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# the whitehead in the corner

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five passages on whitehead,  
and a trampoline and technique in the middle

## passage 1

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### the whitehead in the corner

A small story around a relationship to Whitehead's thinking.

I came to know Whitehead in 2012, during a class with Erin Manning. The first time I read Whitehead, I knew I was entering into a completely different way of envisioning the world, a way that made so much sense for the way that life, for so long, felt to me. He presented a beautiful gymnasty of words for wording precisely and rigorously and with the shape of pain<sup>1</sup>, how experience felt. Finally, a wording of experience in a way that doesn't bash experience, crash it, and smash it, I thought. Bashing, crashing, smashing of experience were common for me before reading Whitehead. Yet now, a new opening was emerging. The way of thinking thought that Whitehead introduced to me, asked from me, to practice headstands every once and again while reading it. It is

as if I needed to let this thought enter through my feet and then pour it down little by little, together with the blood across the body. It was a different way of thinking and as such it needed a different bodying configuration in order to welcome it and feel it. Different ways of thinking require different bodily inclinations, I suppose. If you hear something that doesn't sound familiar, try hearing it again, while changing your body relational stance, see if you understand it differently.

For five years I spent time getting to know Whitehead's propositions. I like to think that I spent time with him through the reading of his thoughts, through multiple encounters with the pages. I like to think that we became friends of sort. We had multiple conversations, multiple ah's, various: "so that's what it was!" moments. I like to think that we had numerous conversations. I enjoyed the thought that we became friends of sort. There was this moment when I thought: Whitehead, you and I understand each other. And I love remembering a soft voice traveling back through space-time, sending an affirmative nod. We became such friends that we would take naps together. *I would fall asleep, laying down on the side of my body with the book opened resting on top of my right hip.* I usually nap on my left side. I would wake up to a very chatty leg that enjoyed telling me all about the time it spent with Whitehead's page while I slept. And here I was, thinking that the words were also asleep. Someone told me that they like to sleep with a book under their pillow. Little I knew.

Little I knew that the rustle of the page, the small yet differential constant weight of the book, the angles reclined into the curves of the always rolling leg, the whispers of the always alive words willing to be heard, the brush of small leg hairs with the small paper pores in every nonconscious breath, were already in conversation. A conversation as important as the ones one has in what apparently is a more active engagement with the work. Those moments make a difference. They tell other kinds of stories. And you could think that any book could do this, but I differ. The *compositionality*<sup>2</sup> of the words, singing through the book you carry matters; not all the words feel the same when resting on your lap. Some words make your legs bounce the books away. That's just what it is: an instant, not this one, not with judgment really, mostly with care for a relational health. Hopefully. But little I knew that the Whitehead book resting on my lap while napping was already in-forming a relationship with his work. People joke sometimes about how when you leave an opened book on top of your head, the

information seeps through osmosis into you. I take this very seriously, that's why, since this napping realization, I like to practice small doses of opened books on top of various and different parts of my body, the floor next to me, being a crucial body part, of course.

Because life changes, there was a stop to this process. A pause perhaps is more accurate; a long pause with the duration of a year. And so for that year, I put Whitehead inside a locked cabinet, far from reach. From one moment to another, the cabinet became a drawer, those things happen you know, and so Whitehead went in there. Of course, as it happens, I lost the key. One fine day, the key appeared and so I opened the drawer. I tried to reach for the Whitehead, but I could only feel the edge of the book. It is as if it didn't want to be pulled from there. I understood that things don't usually enjoy being left or kept in drawers and so I understood that now it didn't want to come out. My life circumstances had changed, and Whitehead had no interest whatsoever in spending time with me under these new conditions. I closed the drawer and tried to strategize a different approach.

I'm not someone with good strategy<sup>3</sup>, so I just kept trying to reach for Whitehead inside that drawer. But the more I reached, the more it traveled to the farthest back of the drawer. It is as if the drawer's back end was growing together with my reaching efforts. It is as if this drawer actually had no back end. At some point I had the sensation of my arm tiptoeing. At another point I was convinced that *my whole body went inside that drawer* and it still couldn't reach.



whole body reach. Image by hh.

‘One cannot reach what doesn’t like to be reached’, the phrase appeared in my mind, chanting. Very soon, this drawer became a room and my reaching arm was pushed away from what now became the bottom edge of a closed door. Again, those things happen, you know. The funny thing about this door is that you could only see its remains. You could only figure out that it was a door because you could still see some faint remnants of the door’s edges, as if they were merely drawn on the wall. But that didn’t matter so much. You could also know that it was a door because through the bottom edge you could see the room on the other side.

Through the bottom’s slit of this weird not-quite-a-door door you could see the room. And so I brought my stomach to the floor as to bring my vision closer to it. The space to see through this slit was so small, that I had to keep my eyes as still as possible as if trying to puncture my own field of vision in order to grasp an almost clarity of the room, on the other side of this not-quite-door. I finally could see and there, Whitehead was. He had become a kind of person, and there he was all crunched with his back leaning on one of the corners of the room. I could actually only see that one corner, not the others. I would have thought that this room had other three corners, but who was I to know what kind of room this was. I was satisfied with this one corner and also with discovering this little man whom I assumed was Whitehead, this time. *There he was, all crunched into this corner and into his own body. His shoulders were up and roundly falling toward his knees, which at the same time were crawled in, as near as possible toward his chest. His head was almost hidden in between his legs.* This is a very flexible situation, I thought, the one in which this body is. I thought to leave Whitehead alone. Give him some elbow room, I thought.

Another day I came back. I usually like to give things a day or two to change their minds or soften up their stances or to try again with them. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t. I came back after some days. I brought my mouth near the door’s bottom edge and said something like: come on, come out, I want to think with you again. I put one of my ears next to the door’s bottom edge to try to hear an answer. But I heard sobbing. I realized that Whitehead was crying. I repeated my invitation. I moved back and forth from mouth to ear, from ear to mouth. Don’t remember the exact conversation, it is all fuzzy now as if inside of a bottle full of water. It must have been all the collected tears from the Whitehead’s crying. To my surprise, one of those times,

Whitehead answered, still crying but he answered, his words affected by the crying rhythms: no, leave me alone, I don't want to play with you no more. I could remember those words coming out from a child's mouth a while ago and it was funny that this tone of voice was coming from the Whitehead, but I didn't give much importance to this. I kept insisting. Come on Whitehead, come with me, let's take naps together again and do headstands and roll on the floor while thinking thought and stretching words. This pitiful story kept replaying day after day. Then when I was ready to give up thinking, that's it, this is not the path I'll walk. One day my invitation slipped the words play and coffee under the door. And while I was moving from mouth to ear and my eyes happened to pass near the door's bottom filament, my body jumped. I was startled, because all of a sudden, Whitehead's body was no longer moaning all donutted away in the corner, his body was near the door, ready to open it. The not-quite-door became just a door. I'm not sure I like this part of the story because I preferred the not-quite door than just a door. More than the play word, it must have been the coffee word that pulled him, for sure, because next thing you know, we were both sitting at a coffee place, drinking coffee together, Whitehead back on his book form. Such a versatile character I tell you.

This is, in a very smashed way, the story of my relationship with Whitehead's thought. As with all stories, there's many other occasions left out, but this text likes to think that this story satisfies itself this time like this. "The writing writes itself".

## passage 2

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### the ice cream and the longest tongue in the wall

You are waiting for a bus. It is almost 37 degrees Celsius, feels like 45, you are convinced that this is it. This is how you end. I don't say this lightly. You feel a certainty that is almost laughable because you are almost never certain of anything but of

uncertainty mainly. You are convinced that you are melting like the ice cream on that girl's hands across the street, you move away from her field of vision in case she confuses you with her ice cream. *Kids sometimes have extremely long tongues, and even if a road separates you and her ice cream, you know that this kid's power has all the capacity to lick, all the way from across the street, your melting skin, in the bit of a second.* But this is an irrelevant fragment of this paragraph. The relevant part is that, while waiting for the bus and intensively thinking with Whitehead, on activity, you encounter a wall. You see-feel this wall. You think, what about this solidity? The wall next to you feels hard, strong, weighty and stubbornly there, like all of a sudden it is all determined not to move with your idea of activity. It refuses. You ask kindly, but it just stays there, enacting an *immobile-like donkey in the middle of the road*, almost mocking at you, because, honestly, things, just as kids, enjoy refusing and demonstrating you that you are not in charge of them, as a matter of fact, it is quite beautiful. You stop asking the wall to move and suddenly you are pulled to the details of activity, trails of time's doings living in the wall. A crack pops, and little by little in the blink of an eye there's so many cracks you cannot count. There's even a piece of wall missing. Where did it go? you think. I didn't know walls liked taking strolls. Oh well. Now you know. Suddenly this wall started feeling so full of activity, and it actually felt fragile, like it could give up to all its small almost imperceptible cracks. But you didn't like this thought. Too much activity and there's only pulverization left. *A phrase sings itself in your tennis-court-like mind:* it is a compositionality of activity, not only activity. Not only activity moving perpetually into dusting. It is a way that activities enter into relation with more activities. So now activity is activities, it is plural, and it is multiple, oh yeah. This is not a wall in the idea of wall, you think. This is *activities walling*, choosing walling as its mode of existing, at this specific intricate time lapse. The donkey-like walling looks back at me, still smiling and it whispers softly, in the kindest of voices ever heard: I was not smiling in order to resist you, or to demonstrate to you that you were wrong you see, I was smiling at you because I was welcoming you into feeling the movements that at first encounter your limited-scaled-perception sensed as solid. See, I may be a wall, but I am not a cage for movement, constant activities persist in and through me, I'm a kind of porosity, I'm in constant movement, like this, this time. Intuitive modes of understanding are capable of dancing with wall's walling. At this moment, the wall's pores are so palpable that you believe yourself capable of crossing it. You attempt your project. From the outside, it seems as if you're just bouncing up, against the wall, but in

reality, the wall welcomes you into its field of circumstances. *And like the tongue of the girl that didn't lick your melting skin, the wall sucks you into itself, you become wall. Your body becomes a flat monkey pasted onto the wall. It's a funny image looked from the outside. And it was not the girls tongue that licked you in but instead the wall's walling tongue that swallowed you entirely into its walling.* Compositionality has ways of bundling *becomings* of apparent different species toward a durational speciation<sup>4</sup>.

### passage 3

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#### the day i learnt to drink mezcal

How is it that activity is introduced into a consideration of the world?

The writing drops some stones in the water here and there. It is a most interesting process you know? Things appear in the writing and zones emerge. It almost feels as if the page would start whispering while it gets written, as the lines emerge, the whispers glow, pulsate, grow larger, or trembling, they growl. Sometimes, these stone-like words stay there, just holding-in-place a thought that lingers, itself a suggestion of a future, now it pushes forth, now it enjoys its spasmodic dormancy. It feels itself as those stone-like weights you non-carefully and sometimes very carefully place on top of a towel or scarf that you lay on a sandy beach's irregular soil. Very interestingly, these appearing thoughts are stone-like, holdings-in-place, but at the same time they are also the towel-scarf-cloth, wanting to fly or being calmly there, depending on the ocean's winds. Some of these dropped stones are like those passing traits of the world that only appear on the periphery of the eye; phantasmagorical traits, "blocs of sensation"<sup>5</sup>.

While writing the above proposal for taking us from 'things' as static stuff to 'things' as activity, the writer starts questioning herself: But how do we arrive to activity, why,

activity? Has this writing done the necessary work for arriving to the concept of activity yet? The question grows larger as the steps increase: Why activity? What proofs it? The writer is reminded “that actual entities are the only reasons; so that to search for a reason is to search for one or more actual entities” (PR, 24) which constitutes what Whitehead calls the ontological principle of process philosophy, or philosophy of organism which is the one that this text orbits-with.

It is not straight forward you know? A thought doesn't build itself in advance. At least not here. The writer takes a pause from this section. Some days of walking the question out, were needed. Not many, just enough to find the (answer) moving force of this question's *colorality* in the world. It is not that she knows she is pausing, nor that throwing the question to the world in a walk is needed. This could only be known in retrospective. But anyways, this day she was on a sidewalk talking to someone. She shared with a friend that her writing was stuck on this question. I'm trying to say that the world is made out of activity. She says. Oh. He says. But I'm stuck in a part where the reader in me asks the text where does activity come from? What is behind activity? She laughs doubtfully. I see. He says. Yes, but at some point, I'm dancing with Whitehead's thought that “[t]here is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real” (PR, 18) and if I'm trying to say that an actual entity is activity, we would also have to dance with the thought that, ‘there's no going behind activity’, mostly, behind activity we would have more activity. Ha! She laughs forcefully. Yah, that's what I was going to say. He says. End of the encounter. She walks away already not reminding if she ended this encounter properly or if she just left impolitely, –this happens to her often and for this, a grain of cellular tissue on her low right jaw laments for half a second, before the (interest) pull for something else takes over again. As she walks away, she gets hit with a small sliced fragment of her recent existence. She is convinced that her friend gave the answer by placing it in her stomach, this produced a voice in her that spoke the answer through her mouth, but it clearly was not her talking. On further thought, she realizes that it was not her friend nor her the ones arriving to the (answer) moving force, but mostly, the encounter that produced it. She feels satisfied with this explanation. You place something out in the world and the world kicks it back at you. She forgets.



Yet, it would be nice to remember here, at this point, a consideration around this so-called-answer. The funny thing about the answer that she got was that it sounds very similar to the question itself. It is still the question, dancing, taking even more intensity, living, coming to life. This reminds me of that time we were there in, remember? When the whole artist's conversations collapsed due to the colonial forces felt on that ground, by European folks talking about what they talk in Europe around dance and performance while wondering: Why are we here in a land that is not our land talking about our things and things that happen on our land? We want to hear the local voices! We want to know what happens here! Only to get a prompt: dirty clothes are washed in your own houses! From there on, all the artist's talks were cancelled. I prefer remembering this event without the information that surrounds it, and perhaps that can be perceived as a careless attitude from my side. I give up to silence to this kind of perception. I'm always open to go for a walk or a coffee and tell the story with as many details as the hungry ears can take, that's as much as body-skin can take. Anyway, all the pre-programmed talks were cancelled, and in their place, working groups were proposed and small conversations around interests and appetites emerging on the ground were formed; no one was required to go to anything, things were open to whomever wanted to participate. At least that's what was announced. It felt awkwardly different from this though, while people tried.

Tangent: this was the summer when I learnt to drink-smoke-breath mezcal from the town people at a local *mezcalería*. I arrived there one of those days that the body decided to escape from the conference where I was. I went for a wandering walk toward the mountain, and hidden around a turn, a house-mezcalería was waiting for my escaping throat. Some locals sitting at the tables around, after watching me drink a *caballito* as if I wanted to imitate a bad Hollywood representation, gently laughed at me and said, in a loud yet non-rude voice as if they wanted the mountain to hear: you clearly don't know how to drink this, if it is ok with you we could teach you. I said I'd love to learn. It is not about drinking, you want to breath the mezcal and with the mezcal, otherwise it is just a drink, and mezcal is not just a drink, it is Nature and Life. So, you want to breath with it, you want to build a relation. You need to sip it as if absorbing it, and breath in together with that, then keep it in your mouth for a long time, while holding your breath. You want all the chemistry of this vapoury-liquid elixir to bathe all of your mouth surfaces so that you welcome it respectfully. The more you leave it in your

mouth the more it will resonate with you. Then when you are ready, depending on your practices of holding your breath, you let it through, don't think of it as swallowing it, it is more a canal's passage. At the same time that it goes down your throat, you let the air come out and you kind of smoke it out. Then you become a truly mezcal connoisseur. Try it they said. But don't look at me while I do it. I said. They turned around to allow me the difficult challenge of a beginner's gorgeously clumsy attempt. I went for it, trying to follow-feel the carefully crafted procedure. Tangent's tangent: When I smoked out the sip, my whole body went into what I picture as, when we used to do this radio recordings as children, and for the rain sound, we would agitate an aluminium sheet toward the air and back, in a rapid short series of movements, made out of a small amount of repetitive back and forth spasmodic undulations. Autocorrect says nodulations. I also like it. End of Tangent's tangent.

End of tangent. In one of the working groups we tried a kind of open mic thingy. Participants were sitting in a circle surrounding a lonely microphone placed at the center, ready to receive our voices. There was a rule: You could only talk in the form of questions in this microphone. During this whole event my body started shaking strongly, for many things, but mostly because I perceived this indigenous man standing by the door of the salon that was hosting this circled questioning. Suddenly a question grew in my stomach. My body jumped. I tried to stop it but it was late, body was indecisively determined. It walked directly to the microphone and asked: I wonder what your name is? While I was looking to the direction of this indigenous man. Eyes got watery as the question pushed itself out against all desire. I wonder why your body is outside this apparently inclusive circle, I wonder (*me pregunto*) what could we do to invite you into this talk? I wished there was a limit to one question in this exercise, or perhaps there was and body irruptuously-irrupidamente, broke this one as it enjoys doing. We've had serious talks but body doesn't like to comply with my requests for it to behave. This man at the door looked back at me and smiled. But the circle in the room stood up in revolt, apparently my questions were upsetting, out of place, impolite. Please don't do that. A voice coming from this circle, said. I went back to my place. Body left. Very soon the questioning was over and I was there with *Juan* still standing at the door's edge. I went there to apologize. To which he said, still smiling back at me. *Eres impulsiva, no mucha gente es impulsiva hoy día. Quiero que conozcas a mi nieta, cuando te escuchó en el micrófono, me dijo que cuando crezca quiere ser como tú.* "You

are impulsive, not many people have impulse anymore, I want to introduce you to my granddaughter, when she grows up she wants to be like you, she said while you were talking on the microphone". I hesitate if to write the part of the girl wanting to be like me, as pronounced by his grandfather but it is what he said and so I share the complete phrase. I told him no one should be like me, hopefully, it is way too difficult, even for me. He smiled back. The little girl too. I tried to continue with my apology. *Siento haberte señalado. Le dije.* I'm sorry I did what I did. Él seguía sonriendo, agarrando a su nieta de la mano. He continued smiling back at me, holding his granddaughter by the hand, whose eyes were huge and also smiling back, with so much brightness and future in them. It always surprises me how a phrase, from a day on, gets printed on the skin and is always there ready to come back and tap softly on the right shoulder at the least unexpected yet necessary moment, as an important note you always keep on your back pocket without knowing. The man-on-the-edge-of-the-door said the following: People desperately look for answers and want answers, but they don't realize that the real challenge in life, is to find just this one thing: a question. La gente siempre anda buscando respuestas, quiere respuestas, pero no se dan cuenta de que el gran reto de la vida es encontrar sólo una cosa: una pregunta. We laughed together, and I thanked him for his gift. He thanked me back for mine. We never met again. He's always there, holding the edge of that door, holding future's hand, most lovingly.

## Technique

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### deshebrando

In Mexico, there's this cheese that's called *quesillo* also known as *Queso Oaxaca*, or the other way around, depending on which region from Mexico you are speaking from. It is similar to *mozzarella* cheese but made with cow's milk, also similar to string cheese. When cooking with *quesillo*, one needs to *deshebrar* it, one needs to separate the strings but not completely, it is as if you would need to open the cheese and start losing its closeness. When you use it, you need to bring the threads apart, but in a way that won't

separate them entirely so that they don't lose a kind of relationality. It is also like unknotting but not fully, like just opening the knot enough. That's how this writing is feeling right now and how it emerges and writes itself, like one needs to *deshebrar* a bolt of threads that are all clumped together, so that if I *deshebrate* them, I can slip my hands through and actually touch the threads. So, this is the technique we will use now in order to revise the questions posed above on the opening of this text on thought. *Deshebrar* could also be called fraying because it is a similar movement, although different.

Trampoline

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on activity: a sandwich between the passages

Coming back to how is it that we arrive to activity and movement since we are trying to think activity — although perhaps activity is already thinking itself through in all the deviations —, let's come back to Whitehead. We will find in relation to his questioning of the *common-sense-doctrine* that he won't necessarily be against it, since he will say that "in some sense it is true", it is "greatly defective" and it goes as far as it goes (NL20), but still he will ask: "what large features of the universe cannot be expressed in these terms" (NL, 13-14) and "with this general concept of Nature, there have somehow to be interwoven the further concepts of life and matter" (NL, 13) which in a way is activity per se, in its complexity. Whitehead goes into saying that this *doctrine* "omit[s] our intuitive modes of understanding" (Ibid), it "omit[s] those aspects of the universe as experienced, and of our modes of experiencing, which jointly led to the more penetrating ways of understanding" (NL, 20). And here is where I find the answer to my sudden fear for proof of activity. Instead of attempting to find proof, which is not the character of this writing, we will craft an underway, we will call upon the universe as experienced, we will call upon modes of experiencing and we will summon a feeling of "the deepest intuition" (NL, 20).

flying tiger thought: If activity is what the world is made of, and if thought is in all activity, then we have that: Thinking is in the world!

The chanting phrase that cuts this text this way is: The world is made out of activity.

Whitehead proposes the world as activity. Or so my hallucinatory note says. In order to visit the proposition of thinking in the world, we need to arrive to the world as activity. But in order to arrive to that one, we will need to visit some other notions. Instead of explaining the reason behind this proposition beforehand, I advise the reader to move with the proposition as it unfolds below, and find out in the trip, as the writer does herself.

Departure: “‘Actual entities’ -also termed ‘actual occasions’ -are the final real things-, of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real” (PR 1978, 18). So, we have that for Whitehead, the world is made up of actual entities, also termed, ‘actual occasions’, and also termed in other texts of his, ‘occasions of experience’ (AI, MT), which is the notion that this text will follow more closely, as it feels more affinity toward this last one (without a disregard for the others).

If we say that the world is made up of these occasions of experience-actual entities-actual occasions, then we will need to visit the notion of occasions of experience or actual entities. And if we are trying to say that the world is made out of activity as an operation to put thinking in the world we will then need to also say, –in following Whitehead’s departure: actual occasions are the real things of which the world is made up (PR, 18)–, that an actual occasion is itself an activity.

An actual occasion is itself activity.

An occasion of experience is itself an activity.

Actual entities are activity.

If an actual occasion is what the world is made up, and if an actual occasion is activity. And if there's no going behind an actual entity, then we have that: there's nothing behind activity.

Phrases like these make my breath go away or make my thought feel like a dried paste, stuck on the back part of a stiff tube, which you need to squeeze out, difficultly. But it also feels good once it is out. Like you can finally paint with it.

In Whitehead's phrase above, there's a part that jumps to the sight, or to the skin, like a pinch. When he says the following: 'the final real things'. Here, the word 'thing' is a difficult one. As if it would be a wall that won't allow thought to go through. But at the same time, it is the kind of word that we use a lot and it kind of gives us a calmed way to understand 'things', see? This reminds me of how much, vocabulary falls short when one is trying to articulate. This also reminds me of what I like to call, a *gimnasty* of words (gymnastics + artistry) (and perhaps + tics). This term is hallucinatorily inspired by Whitehead's invitation to stretch words and phrases when he says that,

deficiencies of language stand in the way inexorably. Words and phrases must be stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage; and however, such elements of language be stabilized as technicalities, they remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap. (PR, 4)

Whitehead himself uses the word 'thing' at times, "[h]ere I am using the word 'thing' in its most general sense, which can include activities, colours and other sensa, and values. In this sense, a 'thing' is whatever we can talk about" (NL, *emphasis in the original* 26); he does this to remain close to ordinary language. However, he is going to invite us to rethink and challenge what we mean when we invoke this word, as he already does when he says, 'the word thing, which can include activities'. Here is where this writer finds the clue for the invitation: to move from enduring self-identity enclosed and static stuff (NL) to the option of conceiving a 'thing' as a movement itself, as an activity, not enclosed and not static, meaning non-localized.

Whitehead proposes us to think a 'thing' then, as an occasion of experience, instead of thinking it in the most common sense, as static, spatially situated, closed, immobile

stuff, what if we were to think it as an activity, he suggests (NL, 26). This can indeed be challenging. We want to think this 'thing' as movement but very quickly, there's a rebound motion that takes us right away and back at it as static stuff. It is actually a funny exercise if you try it for a while. Think a thing as movement, as activity, and it bounces back to static, think it again and back bouncing it goes ahem, do it again, and once again, and it comes back aha. Perhaps this doesn't happen to all, or perhaps to anyone but to the one that writes in here it does; still, it is a fun experiment, I like to think. When telling a friend this phrase he answered this: "Aha, bouncing back static is movement . . . or where do you think movement is? Or movement is moving, so grasping the idea of where it is, can move too." (in conversation, 2018, asked to remain anonymous). I then told him that he got the idea to which he answered: "It is not that I got the idea, the phrase provokes this thought, so this thought is already in the phrase" (Ibid). I share it here because I don't think these thoughts can live not together anymore.

Continuing, in *Nature and Life*, Whitehead attempts to challenge this notion of 'thing' as static stuff, localized in an empty space. He writes that this notion of thing as static stuff, is part of what he calls the *common-sense doctrine* of the world.

When we survey the subsequent course of scientific thought throughout the seventeenth century up to the present day, two curious facts emerge. In the first place, the development of natural science has gradually discarded every single feature of the original common-sense notion. Nothing whatever remains of it, considered as expressing the primary features in terms of which the universe is to be interpreted. The obvious common-sense notion has been entirely destroyed, so far as concerns its function as the basis for all interpretation. One by one, every item has been dethroned.

There is a second characteristic of subsequent thought which is equally prominent. This common-sense notion still reigns supreme in the workaday life of mankind, it dominates the market place, the playgrounds, the law courts, and in fact the whole sociological intercourse of mankind. It is supreme in literature and is assumed in all the humanistic sciences. Thus, the science of Nature stands opposed to the presuppositions of humanism. Where some conciliation is attempted, it often assumes some sort of mysticism. But in general there is no conciliation. (NL, 14)

For him, this *common-sense doctrine* which at other times he refers to as *materialist*<sup>6</sup> and *positivistic philosophy* (NL, 54), gives us the challenging notion of ‘thing’ that looks a little bit like this:

[W]e can conceive Nature as composed of permanent things—namely, bits of matter, moving about in space which otherwise is empty. This way of thinking about Nature has an obvious consonance with common-sense observation.

There are chairs, tables, bits of rock, oceans, animal bodies, vegetable bodies, planets, and suns. The enduring self-identity of a house, of a farm, of an animal body, is a presupposition of social intercourse. It is assumed in legal theory. It lies at the base of all literature. A bit of matter is thus conceived as a passive fact, an individual reality which is the same at an instant, or throughout a second, an hour, or a year. Such a material, individual reality supports its various qualifications such as shape, locomotion, colour, or smell, etc. The occurrences of Nature consist in the changes in these qualifications, and more particularly in the changes of motion. The connection between such bits of matter consists purely of spatial relations. Thus, the importance of motion arises from its change of the sole mode of interconnection of material things. (NL, 12)

This kind of picture of things, “instead of the welter of detailed transformations of motion” (NL, 19), leaves us with a merely “systematic aspect of Nature ... a dead Nature” (NL, 19). “It cannot be that these are merely the formulae of the multiplication table—in the words of a great philosopher, merely a bloodless dance of categories. *Nature is full-blooded*. Real facts are happening” (NL, 29 *emphasis added*).

This is the picture that Whitehead will invite us to contest. This is the *common-sense doctrine* notion of a ‘thing’ that Whitehead is going to try to agitate, so as to bring movement and activity, back into it, not only into it, but to actually transform it in our concept of it as activity itself. Not that it has movement in it but that it itself *is* movement. Not that it has activity in it but that it itself *is* activity. In short, his proposal is going to take us from ‘things’ as static stuff to ‘things’ as activity. It is important to note that the rebound back to the notion of a ‘thing’ as static, will always pull back. And this I would say, is an interesting philosophical question that I will try to explore



further, on a different section of this text, the pull back of the static<sup>7</sup>. Hint: Abstraction, Limited Sense-Perception, Average Fact.

In Whitehead's proposal of taking us from 'things' as static stuff to 'things' as activity, he will mention reiteratively the following,

The state of modern thought is that every single item in this general [*common-sense*] doctrine is denied, but that the general conclusions from the doctrine as a whole are tenaciously retained. The result is a complete muddle in scientific thought, in philosophic cosmology, and in epistemology. But any doctrine which does not implicitly presuppose this point of view, is assailed as unintelligible. (NL, 16)

Whitehead reminds us again and again that "[t]he presuppositions of the old common-sense view survive, even when the view itself has been abandoned as a fundamental description" (NL, 24) and I wonder why it seems relevant to him to insist on this? And even, this writer feels, an intuition to affirm at this point, that it is perhaps this, which this text is trying to insert itself into, into this very insistence; the insistence of a 'thing' as movement and activity. How come we do know that things are movement and in movement and yet, a lot of our vocabulary and practices remain in the position of position and static self-enduring entities? I am not trying to blame anyone here, I am just wondering with feelings, moving feelings. And yet I wonder sometimes, how do we know that things move if most of our perception would give us the opposite information, does it though?

#### Passage 4

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stringy cheese lemony squeezy

An example: Whenever I think the phrase: “one thing relates to another”, I always wish there was a different way to say that, since I usually feel something clingy in that phrase. Meaning that I often feel this phrase as highly inaccurate to actually say anything because it, too rapidly pushes away, what I want to say, into a paradigm that merely conceives things, as permanent bits of matter, with an enduring self-identity (NL, 12). This, actually for me, makes no that much sense. So the phrase and its vocabulary resources, feel clingy, because they cling to an idea of ‘things’ that doesn’t allow for movement to enter into the picture, like this, all we conceive for a ‘one’ or for ‘another’, are separated bits of matter. This is what I often call, as a shortcut of thought: ‘the separated entities problem’. And this shortcutting of thought may indeed be the problem, for perhaps, when we say this thing and another; we are merely referring to things as a shortcut that sits in place for a more complex environment. And if we would stop to articulate more fully or in more detail the environments of each *eachness*’ activities, we would then, end up telling complex stories to refer to a ‘simple’ thing and then to refer to another. And here the writer finds a clue: that perhaps there’s no such thing as a ‘simple’ thing, although we’d love to cling to that idea too, or we’d love if things were ‘simple’. But also I would venture to say that even if there’s no such thing as a simple thing, a complex environment of activities could actually be simple, so that complexity, in this proposal, wouldn’t necessarily be opposed to ‘simple’, nor that it would attempt to erase, nor contest a feeling of the ‘simple’.

Let’s think the example further, imagine you would say: “you and I” or “the chair and you” but in a way that wouldn’t cling to the *common-sense doctrine* that Whitehead describes above as self-enduring things. Then perhaps you would say a story for you, and a story for I, that wouldn’t make them, these enduring things but agitated activities. Let’s see. Like, instead of ‘you’, I’d say something like: ‘circular jumpy cat-like *creaturing*’ and for I I’d say something like: ‘stringy cheese summery squeeze’. Bear with me, says this text. And so you would end up saying something like: ‘circular jumpy cat-like *creaturing* and stringy cheese summery squeezing will go to the movies’. But even further, you could do this operation with the word movies, for example: ‘screen reflections lighting sonorous affective flashes *colourings*’; just to say something. Then the phrase would get longer. A flash cutting through thought or a small novel: now imagine a character that would have to spend all his life wording the story of movies in the way I just described before, imagine the line and the words just never end, because

there's always more ways to say the activity that movies is, I may write this novel's character's line one day or maybe not. And this operation actually feels a lot like the *deshebrar* movement, I explained above. In this example, you'd end up saying something like: 'circular jumpy cat-like *creaturing* and stringy cheese summery squeezing will go to they screen reflections lighting sonorous affective flashes *colourings*'. You could clarify, if talking with a stranger of this activities-based language, by saying: 'circular jumpy cat-like *creaturing* that constellations-like-*peopleing* call 'you' and stringy cheese summery squeezing that constellation-like-*peopleing* usually calls 'I', will go to they screen reflections lighting sonorous affective flashes *colourings* that constellation-like-*peopleing* often calls movies'. You could tell all kinds of stories, not these ones in particular, they could even be longer, if you keep the exercise of *activating* each word so that they no longer remain these self-enduring things and instead, they become activities. But perhaps this is too much of a stretch? I hope the exercise in the example does something at least. Hopefully, this helps us consider Whitehead's invitation toward a world made up of actual entities as occasions of experience which are themselves activities, that then would necessitate an activity based *linguaging* rather than the most common one in place which is a nouns-based language.

## assage 5

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when the table became a volcano or  
a mountain pops on the corner of an overwhelmed dinner table and tilts it over

Sometimes activity can be overwhelming. I'm sitting in a table full of people. We are having dinner. Everything moves. The voices get all mix together with the salad at the middle of the table. The skin feels all the spikes from tones around and textures in the

thoughts that enter into people's mouths together with their meal's forking. The stripes of the coloured stripy table cloth dance together with the gazes that cross like vectors in all directions, puncturing all soft edges. Light refractions, on the glasses half-full of water, offer a soft mattress, once in a while, to bounce experience into short rests from all the movement's fractalities. It all becomes a faraway wobbly dissonant karaoke without written lyrics in front of you to follow. Arms become heavy. The distance from the hand to the glass to the mouth becomes like the greatest abyss ever seen. Blue Mountains in Australia jump to one side of the table and tilts everything toward a precarious 'all-is-about-to-fall' scenario. Almost instantly you put your hands on the table as if attempting to balance the situation. You close your eyes for two seconds, pretending for yourself that you close them for two hours, not to appear more awkward than what's already happening. Within these two hours, that seem like two seconds to the commensals, you see-sense-hear a large purple dot that is more like a formless yet cautiously in-this-way formed paint glob. The spot is a zone, better said, a zoning. It moves from the back top right corner of the dimensionless closed eyes darkness toward the front and middle of it, almost filling up the whole non-spatiality of this head-size canvas. It goes back and forth until its edges shift to a strangely fluorescent green that you don't particularly like but salute nevertheless. The green edges end up eating the pulsating ray of *purpleness*. When there's no more purple, there's no more green either. One was there because of the other or perhaps one was already the other anyway. When this spot dissolves, a ray in the form of a line traverses the non-vision field. It feels as the horizon of the dinner around the table calling for you to come back and join. You resist this call. Funny little stringy figures dance in front of you, you can see them all around, but in order to see them you have to pretend not seeing them. If you try seeing one, it moves. So, you rest your eye movements and your whole skin softens. You enjoy this dance, life in there is way to cool to leave. In the middle of the enjoyment you see this cascade of very thin black and shadow curtain-like silk threads, it takes you no time to figure it out that these *curtainy* layer is made of your eyelashes and it takes you even more no time to realize that your eyes are already half way opening. Before giving up entirely to the horizon's pull you happen to live an extra hour, savoring the astoundingly real theatricality of the shadowy silk lines making a soapy-like surface that interlaces with now another soapy-like surface made by the stringy figures now completely bright. None of these surfaces is in front nor behind the other, nor they are only one, they exchange depth constantly, all this makes a symphony made out of void,

the Blue Mountains' void. You open your eyes and things seem, for your surprise, in place, you take a sip of water, you finish your meal, you smile, you answer kindly to a question across the table with a gentile "yes I think I remember". The plates are empty and a movement to collect dishes and food begins. A new compositionality of occasions of experience opens up its way in the way.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Pain here is the figure of a question that reaches out in this text, while still unknown to itself. The editorial process of the specific crafting of these extracts brought a tending pop quality to it and so the writing is grateful for the gesture. What is meant shortly is that, before reading Whitehead, the writer read many texts that felt as if words were coerced upon experience, imposed upon it and reading them would give a kind of pain to the body, a little bit as if the body would want to shake them off. After encountering process philosophy through Whitehead, the writer came to a *linguaging* world that felt respectful with experience; the body would feel less pain and yet it found a way of acknowledging that pain is an actual part of the question that runs itself through this text and actually is the motor of the question of activity that this text crafts itself around.

<sup>2</sup> *Compositionality* is a concept I develop in a different paper called *A Philosophy of Movement* which is a paper from which these extracts come from. In no way these passages try to deepen conceptually; their character is one of contouring as in a dream-like state, a different quality of a thought through visiting emergent stories that accompany the writing process. *Compositionality* in short is the way I have come to encounter for referring to things as activities rather than as solid, fixed separated entities. Like this, *compositionality* are activities as relational temporary autonomous compositions, instead of separated entities, things are complex knots of relations, a body can be a compositionality but a body-couch can also be a thing, another compositionality, a word compositionality may not only be the words on the page, but also the dreams they create, the voices heard, traveling across temporal universes as felt. *Compositionality* then, is a way to come-into-relation this time, this way. A temporal dance, a way of playing of existence entering-into-relation with itself. For example, think of the *compositionality* of words as if the words in a book that you carry in your bag would start jumping and talking to each other while in a walk to the office; but not only that, these playful mischievous words also carry histories and stories, characters and plots of their own. So many things may happen while you carry a book in a bag to the supermarket, a celebration may be going on in there, a battle, or maybe they go to a parachute adventure. One never knows entirely what happens inside bags, inside books, as one only walks along carrying them beside the ribs.

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is relevant to clarify the difference between strategy and insisting with an activity that at first hand may appear as useless or not getting anywhere. Strategy feels as if you'd need to come up with a way to do something. Strategy feels as having to invent something on top of an activity that is already taking place, here the activity of searching in a drawer and not being able to reach anything. Yet, doing it again and again, as if the reaching would be an important gesture that already does something, even if this something is still unknown. Strategy sometimes disregards that something is already under way, something is already going on. Insisting with an activity is to fall prey into the tics and refrains from an activity taking form, having already its own *tactics*.

<sup>4</sup> On speciation see Erin Manning's *Are You a Gorilla? In Another Regard* in *Always More Than One* (204-221, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> See section on blocs of sensation.

<sup>6</sup> This is what, in the philosophy of organism, Alfred North Whitehead calls "materialism", a problematic philosophical tradition that could be summarized as: "The Cartesian subjectivism in its application to physical science [that] became Newton's assumption of individually existent physical bodies, with merely external relations" (Whitehead 1978, 309).

<sup>7</sup> See Whitehead's *average fact* in *Nature and Life*.