

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



Into continuous unfolding

Sascha Engel

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As the world drowns in plastic garbage far beyond the reach of conjuring ‘recycling’, so our bodies drown in layers of civilized repetition far beyond the reach of conjuring ‘reform’. Out beyond the cities, the world unfolds as continuous connection with me and through me: the wind in my face is the wind driving the waves to shore, the raindrops on my head are the drops running off birds’ feathers, the earth touching my feet is the earth nourishing worms and roots. But I must return to face the onslaught of a life divided into separate chunks, my motions parceled out into repetitive lunacy. Everywhere society forces me into a straitjacket: I am a legal person, a job-seeker, passport-holder, bank account-owner, rights-bearing citizen; I act as a connection, acquaintance, friend, patron, or client; I exchange, gift, deal, complement, integrate; I love, marry, divorce, hate; I drift from purpose to function to inertia; I obey ethics or morals, distinguish between duty, obligation, contract, vacillate between freedom and liberty. Given the circumstances, I might even command or control, direct or conduct, negotiate or circumvent, relieve or support, sacrifice or bargain.

Every gesture we perform stems from roles enacted a thousand times before. Social complexity is implemented in joyless

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Plastic in Utero, no. 1

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monotony. As none other than Alan Turing foresaw, the father of computation, the current hysteria surrounding 'artificial intelligence' shows nothing so much as the extent to which humans have already become robots. We drown in an everyday life whose gestures are just as plastic as its garbage: categorized, normalized, artificial. And this is if we belong to the privileged few of Euro-America!

A total assault to escape the nightmare of plastic existence must therefore aim not only at the garbage littering the world but also at the garbage littering our bodies. The two belong together. Liberal reform can't remove microplastics from our lungs because it won't remove the artificially compartmentalized motions from our lives. Institutions, however fluid, are nothing but habits forced into our bodies by the weight of repetition. They can't be sites of our healing, as they are part of the plasticity that our bodies are pressed into.

Only our bodies themselves are the sites of resistance. Escaping the nightmare of plastic existence means a total transformation of our gestures, embracing a new everyday life based on continuously unfolding connection.

Embracing, that is, what our bodies originally were, have always been, and still are; buried under the thousand-year rubble of domestication. Divisions like that between 'humans' and 'animals' or 'plants', and in-between, evaporate as everything within us tells us of our connection to the continuous unfolding of the world. Body weight, implemented by movements and constellations of muscles, situates us living beings in the material world, regardless of species. Food and drink is mechanically acquired from the world by hands, paws, roots, or mouths, and often some of them together; it is then prepared in the mouth, tearing and pulling it apart, and ultimately broken down chemically. After this, food and drink returns into the world's unfolding as excrement or as energy expenditure, as shell or shelter, as hunt or gathering, as play or conflict. Stone, bone, wooden tools grow out of hands, remaining in

close touch with them, discarded only to be picked up again, returning to the earth or to the bodies picking them up, continuously. Gestures of motility, movements of two legs, four, eight, or however many, connect bodies to the earth. Gestures of breathing connect bodies to the air. Gestures of shelter and survival, food acquisition and excretion, connect bodies to the plants and to each other. So do gestures of expression, from the aggressive to the communicative to the sexual. Bodies form out of gestures as they grow and mature in continuous touch with the world. Bodies dissolve into gestures as they ossify and die, handing their remains over to other creatures within the earth.

This is what everyday life is ultimately made out of: the world continuously unfolding through the gestures of our bodies, not without violence, but without abstract disconnection. There is no human-animal-plant divide here, no gender roles, no division of labor. Such fundamental divides rather make up the first layers of discrete compartmentalization. Social gestures implement repetition, habit, role; separating 'humans' from 'animals', 'religion' from belonging, machines from tools, division of labor from continuous circulation, passivity and aggression from actively settled violence, monoculture from interdependence. As history overwrites bodies, divisions generate repetitive gestures layering on top of each other, inscribing themselves into ever-more disciplined bodies torn from their connection to their home. We no longer unfold within the world. At most, our bodies vacation in wilderness areas, and that's if we're lucky. We might just as well end up in the poisonous filth of electronic waste dumps, or on the twentieth floor of a high-intensity slaughterhouse, where our hooves never touch the grass and our eyes never see the sun.

But our bodies, the bodies of all living beings deformed within the carceral systems made of plastic divisions, are still here. The basic gestures of continuous unfolding are still intact. We can still heal ourselves, reaching across the divisions of plastic existence, clearing the garbage. The reality of continuous

unfolding is still at our fingertips because it is our fingertips. It manifests in our hands and hooves and faces and snouts, our gestures in everyday life. Just as our motions implement the divisions forming our prison, so they can yet implement the continuous gestures of our healed future, shared beyond the human-animal-plant divide.