

Talking About the Universe as if It Existed

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My boss Erick can't stand Yoko Ono.

That surprises me. That anyone would have that much passion about Yoko Ono. That much passion for Yoko Ono. Or against Yoko Ono.

I don't passionately dislike Yoko Ono. And I don't dispassionately like her. I like Yoko Ono ok. But you have to let go of your passion to like Yoko Ono. You have to let go of your own passion to like the passion or the dispassion of Yoko Ono. And Erick won't do that.

Erick talks about Yoko Ono as if he believes she really exists.

When I say "I see", of course I don't mean, I detect waves of a certain length with the receptor cells in my eyes". I don't mean that I transmit electromagnetic pulses through my optic nerve to my brain in response to external stimuli—

We teach seeing: we teach a child to organize the stimuli received by its optic nerve in a certain way only.

We organize the "everything" into "things".

And so he passionately disliked what he believed was the dispassion of Yoko Ono. And he was willing to make this stand, he was willing even though it was in fashion, among his crowd, to like dispassion, to favor it, to privilege it. He was willing to stake his reputation on a preference for passion. It was what made him seem less superficial. He did not like something simply on the basis of its fashionableness.

Is that the corollary of presence: the quality of "depth"? He was not superficial: he was not of the surface. He had mass, volume, dimensionality. He occupied space. His being was not all apparent, he had qualities, characteristics, which were concealed. Which could not be seen. He was not entirely visible.

This is somehow a favorable condition, that one's judgments, one's manor of assigning value to things, should not be entirely determined by measurable conditions or apparent influences. That something comes from a source no one can predict, and yet they can understand it when it is there.

And still it is impossible to describe this thing, to derive the condition of this thing, without in some way resorting to describing some other thing when I say "I see". "He is not superficial" is not a mathematical condition. He is not in relation to himself or to

anything in the way that a denominator is in relation to its numerator, in the way that a tangent is in relation to its sine. He cannot be calculated. He cannot be measured.

To declare that he is not superficial is to declare that he does not exist solely on his surface. But what would the surface of a person be, what is the surface of a social identity? It is not a material thing with mass, volume, and dimensions. It is not a sphere or a cube or even a hyperbolic parabola.

When we describe things in physical terms, in geometric terms, in terms we can measure and terms we can see, sometimes this can help us believe that we are communicating, that we, in our collectivity, are talking about something.

When I say “he is not superficial” the he I am describing cannot be measured, cannot be seen. We cannot take the measure of his volume or his depth.

“He is not superficial” is a statement about him, about the way he forms judgements. “He is not superficial” leads you to understand that he may be unique or unexpected or complex. He has behaviors, he has opinions, that lead us to expect he would have certain other opinions, and when he does not have those opinions, we say that he is not superficial.

We make judgments on his superficiality or his depth, these judgments are different from the judgments we make when we are measuring quantities that we believe to have been proven to exist, we measure his depth or superficiality differently than we measure the water for coffee, though still we believe that both he and the coffee can be proven to exist.

Though we know, if we know anything, that we do not know everything, and therefore our judgments are always premature, are always speculative, are always judgements, involving choices, eliminating some possibilities just to make things more concise.

My non-presence may outlast your presence, is that what bothers you?

My nonpresence may continue even if we stop believing that the universe really exists.

He is in the next room and it is as if he is part of the universe that does not exist.

When I say I see I do not mean that I believe that you or I really exist.
When I say I believe, I do not mean that the things you have done that have had consequences for me are things that prove that you or I really exist.

When I say “he is not superficial” I do not mean that.

This is not the best use of language. This is not the language game between speculative subject positions. This is not something you made up in your head.

When I say this is not what I mean, this is not what I mean at all, I do not mean that you or I can ever really believe that you or I exist. When I say that the things you do have consequences for me I do not mean that this proves that you or I really exist. These things have consequences even if I do not believe that you or I really exist. It is not possible to prove that you or I really exist based on the consequences of the things that you do that have consequences for me.

When I say you do not know I exist, when I say the language games are shiny mirrors, substanceless in themselves and having no relation to the things around them, when I say real, when I say

—when I say the shiny surfaces do not react to things around them, when I say the mirrors reflect only each other, when I say this is not superficial, this is inert, this is not the nonreactive condition of the stable elements, the noncombinatory gases, this is not a considered condition.

When I say that is not what I mean at all I do not mean that you have taken the meaning and twisted it, I do not mean that you have taken the meaning and sheared it between two surfaces, two continental plates sliding in opposite directions, pulverizing what is caught between their surfaces, I do not mean that you are a heated metal rod bent back on itself, I do not mean that somehow I have failed to say what I mean.

My boss does not like Yoko Ono. I like Yoko Ono ok. I do not think Yoko Ono is empty of all passion. And I do not think that the rage that rages through a house to purge the dispassion that is stuck there, I do not think that this rage is a belief. This rage is not a belief.

To talk about the universe as if it existed is not to have a belief. It is not the same thing as having a belief. To rage in a furious rampage to purge the dispassion of disbelief is not to have a belief. To rage and rage and rage and rage is not to have a belief. It is not a belief. It is something different than a belief.

To rage against the mirrored language game that neutralizes belief is not to have a belief. This particular language game, this shiny unreachable fetish,

—someone asked me if I was writing a political poem about the terrible event, if I had written a poem about the terrible event that was political. Much later, very much later, very long after they asked me if I would write a political poem about the terrible event, I experienced a rage against the shiny fetish that poses itself in opposition to belief.

This particular language game, this shiny fetish that is hard and reflective and beyond reach, that does not react to its surroundings, that is not a belief, that is a position against the position of any belief, this shiny opposition to belief, this hot metal rod curled back

on itself away from any possible belief, this shiny fetish that must have attention in order to exist, this is not a belief. That shiny fetish that reflects whatever is around it to draw attention from what is around it,

–I do not believe that the things that anyone has done and the things that anyone continues to do are things that can ever prove or disprove the consequences of belief. It is not possible to prove or disprove the consequences of belief. It is not possible to prove or disprove that the things that anyone has done are the consequences of their belief. It is not possible for someone to know everything that they believe. Knowledge is not belief. If I say I believe and I am doing this thing because I believe, if I believe that what I am doing is because of something I believe, if I am still believing this thing when the thing I believe has been measured and calculated to not be the thing I believe, to be something other than the thing I believe, if there are particles that will someday be measured that will disprove the things I believe,

–if I am in opposition to this opposition to belief, if I do not want to touch or look at the shiny fetish that is the opposition to belief,

–if I am willing to scorch its surface with a heat that is too powerful to reflect, if I melt it to a dark, irregular lump, if I disintegrate it and open the space it once occupied, if I sow the ashes in the fields of belief,

Even something as simple and fundamental as the curve--the regulated shift in tangent between one point and the next--even this throws it off.

But as soon as you admit the possibility of deferment, you admit that the universe can be anything.

Talking about his dispassionate dislike of dispassion as if it existed. This is not mathematical. Like a white telephone, like a blank wall, like a clean brushed bar of aluminum, he existed. Talking about his passion as if it existed. He talked about the universe as if he existed.

My nonpresence may outlast his dispassion.

She talked about the universe as if it existed. She studied the movements of things that might not exist. She measured the things that might not exist by the traces that might have been left by them as they moved. To study the things that might not exist, she built a spherical tank four stories high. She had learned that girlish enthusiasm was effective with the old scientists.

It is impossible to believe in the universe and not be passionate. It is almost not possible to believe in the universe.

When she measured the thing that might not exist, the measurements she calculated might not have been for the thing that might not exist. She made measurements based on other things that had been calculated to exist. Her calculations had to be consistent with the things that were known to exist.

She had to believe in the possibility that the thing she was trying to measure might possibly exist. No one had proven that this thing did exist. She set out to prove that the thing she was measuring really did exist.

If she could prove that this thing did exist, the way that people knew the world would be different. There would be one more thing in the world that was previously not known to exist. This thing would affect the way people knew the other things that were known to exist.

There are things that are said to be known to exist, based on measurements and calculations made with the instruments that we have determined to be measurers of things that are known to exist. Some of the instruments that we have determined to be measurers of things that are known to exist are eyes. Except that we do know that some things that we measure and calculate and observe with our eyes may nonetheless not exist. And that some things that we cannot measure or calculate or observe with our eyes may nonetheless exist. Even if we see it with our very own eyes, even if we can't see it with our bare eyes, we still know it might or might not exist.

Each instrument has its limitations, its particular area of legitimacy. If the thing you are measuring is not what you think you are measuring you may figure that out or you may never figure that out.

The universe does exist, it has been determined to exist, and we are behaving as if it exists at every moment, even now.

He was in the next room the whole time but he never said a word.

I turned on every light in every room even though I could only be in one room at one time.