Shadowing the Anthropocene: Eco-Realism for Turbulent Times

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APPENDIX 3

Practices

The following is a selection of exercises derived from ideas and propositions laid out in Part 2 of this book. The idea with these is that they internalize or habituate the concepts fleshed out herein, allowing practitioners to try them on for size and to learn to “in-habit” them if appropriate. They are creative and experimental arts, to be worked with, modified, and mastered over time. The descriptions below are only the most basic kernels of these exercises. Several are derived from longstanding traditions of existential or spiritual practice found across the mystical wings of the world’s religions (Buddhism being especially prominent here, and Shinzen Young’s system of practical instruction being the most common direct source).

Other exercises can be developed from other suggestions provided in the book. If you are interested in working more directly with any of these exercises described here, please feel free to write the author via my University of Vermont email address or at the blog Immanence, at http://blog.uvm.edu/immanence.

Exercise 1: Basic triad practice

(Relevant section: “Philosophy of the Moment”)
Choose an activity that does not require your full attention, such as sitting comfortably, walking outdoors, or engaging in a safe physical exercise. Scan your field of awareness and note the distinctly qualitative characteristics (the “firstness”) of specific things in it. Select no more than one or a few of these initially, moving from one to another or across several as you gain proficiency for sensing how they feel to you. After a period of time working with firstness, add the “secondnesses” by which you are interacting with one or more of these objects: the force or effort needed to interact with them, the specific resistance they present to you, and the intimately distinctive feel of those interactions. Finally, add the “thirdness,” or the meaning and significance, of one or more of these interactions. Keep each of these levels in your awareness over a period of time while engaged in the specific activity. (Note: See the example of the walk in the woods described in this section of the text.)

**Exercise 2: Prehension practice**

(Relevant section: “Philosophy of the Moment”)

Choosing an activity that does not require your full attention, scan your field of awareness and note the distinctly qualitative characteristics of specific things in it that you are encountering as “objects” of your awareness. Select one or a few of these at first, moving from one to another or across several as you gain a sense for how they feel to you. Then, add to your awareness a sense of how you are engaging with those objects — your thoughts, feelings, and reactions to these in your “subjectivation” of these objects. Next, focus on the interactive middle-ground between one or more subjective prehensions and the objects being prehended. For a time, explore this middle-ground to gain a feel for the prehensive encounter itself as it occurs between “you” and one or more “objects” of your awareness. Finally, if and when you feel prepared for this (which may require developing some proficiency with the above practices alone), add the dimension of “withdrawal,” that is, the feel of the disappearance
of objects from your cognition or capacity to retain, control, or manage them.

Note that in its full form, this exercise is quite advanced, relying on an understanding of concepts explored in depth later in Part 2 of this book. It is recommended that you return to it after reading the entirety of the chapter and trying some or all of the exercises described below.

**Exercise 3: Sensory field practice**

(Relevant section: “Sensings”)

Set yourself a certain amount of time, say twenty minutes, without interruption. Sit comfortably, spine erect but not strained, and choose one or more of the “spaces” or “fields” mentioned in this section: See-In, See-Out, Hear-In, Hear-Out, Feel-In, Feel-Out. Watch what comes up in your awareness of that space, noting things as you observe them (labeling them as such, if it is helpful) and “tasting” their quality, before letting them go and awaiting another thing to note.

If you feel that there is not enough happening, add another layer or space to what you are noticing. If you feel overwhelmed by what there is, reduce the number of things you are noticing, and feel them each a little longer (even staying with each feeling for a certain number of breaths). Find a workable rhythm, perhaps in alignment with your breathing. If you find yourself getting “lost in thought,” just come back to what you were intentionally doing. Alternatively, if thoughts or concerns keep intervening, you could decide to work on breaking down and noting the components of one of these intervening strains. For instance, with thinking, label words “hear-in,” visual images “see-in,” and physical feelings or sensations “feel-in.” If musical phrases or random images arise in your mental field, do the same (noting “hear-in,” “see-in,” and so on). Treat them as anything else that is being noted and then released.

Come back to this exercise on repeated occasions until you have developed a good feel for not only the six different sen-
sory-orientational “spaces,” but some of the cross-modal relationships that may arise frequently (for you) between them. For instance, do specific sounds (“hear-out”) trigger specific feelings (“feel-in”)? Do certain mental images (“see-in”) come accompanied by certain physical feelings or sensations (“feel-in”)? And so on. If you find yourself emotionally drawn to a particular “space,” work with it over time, connecting it to other spaces, until you feel some insight or resolution of whatever the draw in it is for you.

**Exercise 4: Advanced triad practice**

(Relevant section: “Relatings”)

Set yourself a certain amount of time in the midst of some regular activity, such as walking, bicycling, driving to work, eating, taking a shower, listening to music, or browsing the internet. Choose one or more of the eighteen “spaces” or “fields” described so far, that is, the “In” and “Out” variations of any of the following: (1) See, Hear, Feel; (2) Show, Sound, Touch; (3) Map, Convey, Move. Watch how you actively engage with the chosen spaces, labeling any individual event, act, or realization as such and “tasting” its quality, before letting it go and awaiting another to note. Find a workable rhythm, perhaps relating your notings to your breaths.

It is best at first to select the most relevant fields for a given activity. For instance, when walking or bicycling, focus on See-Out, Hear-Out, Touch-Out, and Move-Out. When listening to music, focus on Hear-Out and Feel-In (how the music makes you feel). With time and practice, it is possible to focus more widely. When selecting a wider range of space-activities, you can use more general terms, such as “Sense-Out,” “Act-Out,” “Realize-In,” and so on. (This adds six “gameboard options” to Exercise 3, bringing the total from 18 to 24.)

Treat this as a recurrent practice over time, accumulating insights (or shedding habitual patterns) as appropriate.
**Exercise 5: Flow practice**

(Relevant section: “How to Make a Bodymind Flow”)

Continue working as in the above exercises, but focusing on one or more of the Flow states, either exclusively or in combination with others. This means that to the 24 options mentioned above (18 sensorially distinct options, plus the 6 general options associating with Sensing, Acting, and Realizing in each of their internal and external modes), you are adding at least 12 varieties of Flow: See-Flow, Hear-Flow, Feel-Flow; Show-Flow, Sound-Flow, Touch-Flow; Map-Flow, Convey-Flow, Move-Flow; and the three generals, Sense-Flow, Act-Flow, and Realize-Flow.

In addition, there are variations of Flow states that could be focused on, i.e., “cross-modal” flow, “cross-directional” flow, and “evental-processual” flow. (See descriptions in main text.) It is recommended to spend some time familiarizing oneself with each of these forms of flow, in order to learn to recognize them in any situation.

**Exercise 6: Apophatic practice**

(Relevant section: “The Apophatic, Inside-out Twist”)

These add a further level to the “Rubik’s cube,” but instead of adding another 24 options, they are best worked with in the following three ways.

**Reversal (outline) practice.** This works exactly like the regular practice of the triadic gameboard, with the difference that instead of noting the “positive value” of an appearance (sensing), an action, or a realization — for instance, “Hear-In” when noting internal talk, “Sound-Out” when noting the sound one is making, and so on — the focus is on the negative background surrounding that positivity: that is, on the silence surrounding a sound, on the indistinct tremor surrounding one’s touch of something, on the
unspeakable mystery surrounding one’s understanding of what someone else just said, and so on.

**Shadow triad practice.** Follow the triadic shadows alone, singly or together: that is, on Emptiness, Heart, or Mystery. This is difficult without the practice of the appearances, actions, and realizations, but with time one can develop a “feel” for the three apophatic shadows to the point that a “resting” in the shadows alone becomes possible. These practices alone can provide a profound dimension of experience.

**Gap practice.** Focus attention on the “jumps” across gaps between zeroness, firstness (sensing), secondness (acting), and thirdness (realizing). Each of the apophatic “shadow” categories fills in one of the gaps: (1) Emptiness comes before the observation of appearances; (2) Heart comes between appearances and the arising of action; and (3) Mystery comes between action and the arising of insight or realization. Focusing on these jumps emphasizes the flow between firstness, secondness, and thirdness in the continual generation of reality from Reality.

**Exercise 7: Widening and deepening (recollection) practice**

(Relevant section: “Toward a Logo-ethico-aesthetics of Existence”)

Choose an activity that, for a specified period of time, will not require much active responsiveness from you: for instance, going for a casual walk in a wooded or natural area you are familiar with, riding a bicycle on a familiar bike path, sitting alone in a house looking out a window, and so on. At a relaxed and manageable pace, begin to notice features of the world around you and allow them to “reverberate” in you—for instance, by triggering memories of analogous places or situations you have been in, similar objects you have seen in prior or later stages of their existence, and so on, together with the emotional contours that come with those memories. Allow the memories and sen-
sations triggered in you to resonate in your “depths,” such that they elicit a sense of meanings or significances they may have had for you or may hold for you today in the context of your life, your interdependencies with others, your present goals, and your place in time and space (in reference, for instance, to the Anthropocene, the near or distant future, and so on).

Note these widened contexts and the feelings accompanying them, adding an acknowledgment of gratitude for the ways in which they may bring value or meaning to your life. Make space for them in your awareness, perhaps adding an image, keyword, or “hook” by which you may remember them in the future (such as before going to sleep tonight, or in future interactions with others related to those memories and recollections).