



INSIDE
by Finn Janning

In

“Where does the wind come from?” my son asked. I wetted my finger and stuck it in the air. A mild and gentle breeze cooled one side of it. “That side,” I said, pointing nowhere. “OK,” he said.

Afterward, I thought about the problem that arose from the question, “Where does the wind come from?” The wind doesn’t really blow from one mouth. Even rivers don’t have just the one mouth. Rivers are constructed by their surroundings: the mountains, the rain, nearby lakes, and the ocean, to name but a few. There is no origin. Similarly, the wind comes from everywhere and nowhere.

Perhaps everything comes from there: from nowhere.

Many people prefer to think of places or positions as solid things that delimit one subject from another. Imagine, for example, that someone is arguing from, for, or against a specific position. Here, one divides the totality into something fixed, neglecting that the world is impermanent. Constantly changing. Transforming. Other people may dislike the place in which their cultural background, gender, or sexual identity locates them. One feels labeled, positioned, identified. At times, it can feel like being imprisoned. It is.

Are you inside or outside?

Lines are drawn like swords being raised—ready for battle.
Is it really necessary to decide?

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For several years, I have been thinking about the significance of places and positions. I have always been skeptical toward the idea that some places are more sacred than others, but also that some places or positions are better per se. For example, why is it better to be inside certain groups than outside them? Is it better to be a feminist than a post-humanist? Does it really matter? For most people, it does

matter. It gives them comfort and identity. It helps them to evaluate or favor their own place against another—perhaps a threatening or competing one.

The distinction between inside and outside stems from an all too human need to think in hierarchies and rankings. It's part of our language: good, better, best.

Once again, the swords are raised.

How can we lower the swords?

One answer, but not an exclusive answer, lies in our capacity to think from nowhere.

This is where I start: nowhere.

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OK. What is the problem with places and positions? Was I just born in the wrong place, into the wrong family? No, I am far too privileged to claim such a thing. Rather, positions have a tendency to break the process of becoming. The process stops every time one needs to evaluate according to an already defined moral system or normative ideals.

The problem, I think, is that a place exists because of its definitions. Definitions are useful in order to know what we talk about. However, once we talk about love, for example, as Raymond Carver famously showed in his short story *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, then what we actually do talk about becomes a bit less definite. "I could hear my heart beating. I could hear everyone's heart. I could hear the human noise we sat there making, not one of us moving, not even when the room went dark." Feeling connected as a part of a totality.

A large part of life is beyond our capacity to name. Some sensations, emotions, or intuitions can't be accurately explained in words. Therefore, we should be aware that too rigid a definition tends

to construct a fence around its referent; it draws lines between two or more parts. It's quite similar to when you position yourself in a social context. This is who I am!

Either you are inside or outside. Either/or: every time I am confronted with such rigid dichotomy, I feel like someone is pressing a gun to my head. Do I really need to decide?

Yet although such lines exist, they are nevertheless arbitrary and fictional constructions, often guided by a desire for status, prestige, greed, and power. At times, the various forms of manipulation draw just as many lines as Jackson Pollock's drip paintings do. Inside versus outside, as if life were just a game. However, unlike Pollock's paintings, where each is intensified by and intensifies the other, the various lines that separate things in a society seem to compete with other lines for territorial power.

Lines are drawn to reduce complexity in order to orientate oneself faster and make quicker decisions. Drawing lines is part of our competitive mentality in today's neoliberal world. Time is money, some say. But it's not. Time is change, that is to say, experience. With time, I become someone other than I was. I am always another. To develop essentially means that I leave myself behind. I take a hike into the unknown. "I expect nothing, but I am open for everything," says the artist Jeppe Hein. Expect nothing. Only those who don't expect are really open. One needs to be open and curious in order to experience, to grow, and to become.

Still, many are attracted by the distinction between inside and outside because it makes them less anxious. They belong, like a piece in a puzzle. Unfortunately, this hinders their gaining the power to make decisions that correspond with their natural desires and interests—relating and connecting—and not the desires and interests they are seduced into wanting.

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Let's drop all positioning. It's stressful and depressing. There is so little room for love when one needs to position oneself. Instead, it's wiser to question what we take for granted, question the lines we draw to distinguish a friend from a foe, a bitch from a baby. Philosophy begins by questioning our habits, things that we take for granted. It's an opening. Questions expand the world. The more complex our ability to think, the clearer our path through life will become.

So, I am not going to ask which side you are on because I don't really care. Whether you are inside, outside, onside, or offside is only interesting if one is playing sports. What matters in life, though, is that you are here now. "There is no hope anywhere but in this moment," writes Peter Matthiessen in *The Snow Leopard*.

Utopia, the good place that doesn't exist, is a fantasy for people without any real connection with life. An island in an ocean that never was. Perhaps it's more useful to conceptualize utopia as an ongoing struggle with what is real right here and now, for example with what hinders our growth. What does this situation make possible? What can I also do?

Utopia is an ongoing examination of a life's potential, an examination that takes place right here and now. "Right here, right now," is also what Jeppe Hein tattooed on his arm as a gentle reminder after he emotionally, mentally, and spiritually burned out in 2009, after many years of positioning himself. If one doesn't know what's important, the potential ingrained in the here and now, then one may risk burning out, getting depressed, or becoming impotent in all facets of life.

There is no other world that we can escape to.

There is no reason to keep knocking on heaven's door. We are already inside. There is no outside. Stop knocking.

This is it. Here and now.

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This is an attempt to wipe out all lines. Wipe out all the dualities between inside and outside, up and down, smart and stupid. At the same time, it's also a story of healing. Trying to move beyond this rigid dichotomy is healing. It's an examination. It's not without challenges or difficulties, of course not. If nothing is given, how does one create a path, and how does one know whether this path is better than another?

Intuition.

I am skeptical that norms and ideals are certain and unchangeable for all eternity. Norms are social artifacts. I have faith in a metaphysics of change or becoming. The only thing that I am certain of is that I am humble when it comes to the question of truth. Still, I have a need to create a path for myself, establish a room without borders that can host my memories. Even though the memories aren't really mine to begin with. They are just mashed up with everyone and everything I have encountered. I am, after all, always another. So, I am balancing on the tip of a paradox: How can I create a room for my memories that I don't own?

Share them. Pass them on. Be generous.

What are my memories and what are the memories of me that other people have passed on to me? When does the outside turn itself into something inside? My parents have told stories about me when I was little. Now, I don't know if my memories are caused by these stories—that is, constructed by my parents. Trust is an issue here. Where do my memories come from?

Same place as the wind: nowhere.

The day I became conscious of who I was in the eyes of others, I was already being someone whom I did not consciously create. I was formed. I had an identity. It was given to me. I was placed and positioned by someone else. Male, Caucasian, European, lower-middle-class, and so forth.

All that which is not I is still forming me. Trying to label me. I am wrapped in lines. I roll around on Pollock's canvas. White. Blue. Yellow. Red. Not as psychological colors referring to a certain state of mind. I am colorful. I am all the lines; I am on all sides. I constantly try to overcome my own self. I try because the social identities are powerful.

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No one is born free. One becomes free. Ever since I began to think, which happened when I was 19 years old upon my brother's death, I have tried to become free. The shock woke something, the death encounter a force that jarred consciousness. Life slapped me and I began to move. The freer I am, the more I become no one specific.

More and more, I feel like no one coming from nowhere. And it feels good. Liberating. Being no one in particular, however, is not without value. On the contrary, it's potentially full of everything valuable. Being connected with everything is a process of maturing. I am maturing, not yet mature.

I can recommend dropping one's armor. Entering life exposed.

Side

I am a Dane who lives in Barcelona, Spain, which makes me neither a real Dane nor Catalan, much less Spanish. All national identities are for anxiety inmates. The Catalans need the Spanish to side themselves against. It's like that for many nations and political ideologies. In, out, up, and down. It can make the atmosphere unnecessarily hostile at times. I try to side with all: human and nonhuman. However, I am no Buddhist. Far from it.

My parents and my nephew came down from Denmark to visit my family in Barcelona. On their second day, an early Saturday morning, we were all taking the bus to go watch my oldest son play football (i.e., real European football—notice that lines are interesting in sports). The bus was packed. Bursting, to be more precise. At one stop, the driver couldn't open the door to let more people in. There simply wasn't enough room. A waiting passenger banged on the door. Several times, hard and aggressively. BANG, BANG, BANG. Screams were entering the bus. "Open the door. Idiot, let me in. Let me in."

The driver started to yell, "You won't get inside if you hit my door again." The driver had the power to decide whom to let in. Apparently, it was *his* door.

The passenger went around the bus to the driver's window. I thought they were going to fight. Instead, they talked, loudly. Finally, some people got off the bus (out of fear?) and the outsider boarded. I noticed he was all red in the face. Angry. Sweaty. Furious. I instantly recalled what Michel Serres once said, that people full of resentment age awfully. He had. He looked mean.

Two minutes later, he wanted to pass my mom, who was standing with the stroller where my daughter sat. She couldn't move because of the people in front of her (or behind her for that matter). The newly arrived passenger pushed her. Then he, in Spanish, told

her to move her ass. My mom said to him in Danish, “I can’t move,” while pointing at the stroller. He gave her another push. I turned around and told him in Spanish, “I don’t want to hear one more word from you. Otherwise I’ll throw you off the bus. Do you understand?”

He didn’t say anything. Just looked at me. Still, red, wrinkled, angry, and now, also surprised.

“Do you understand?” I said.

“Yes,” he said.

Two stops later, we all got off the bus. We watched the game. We won. After the game, I dropped the family off at our apartment and went to get some takeout Thai food. While waiting, I noticed that my hands were shaking a little. Not much, but since they never shake, I noticed it, enough to not be able to read the book I had with me. I was affected by what had happened earlier. I had done something that I needed to do—or so it seemed. Otherwise he might have pushed my mom over. Then again, he might not have.

Yet I didn’t like it at all. Could I have breathed and counted to ten, then walked over and showed this person compassion? Could I have been empathic with his situation? Probably, I believe so, but I did not. I did not give him a hug. Instead, I became threatening because he was. Fighting fire with fire as if I were a member of Metallica. This, of course, is not what Buddhists refer to when they talk about becoming one with everything. For example, I did not become the smiles that were also present on the bus. Instead, I became a suitable fighter. Two hours later, my hands were shaking, not because of him, but because I had done something that I didn’t like, done something that I don’t think is very productive.

I was not being worthy of what happened.

Thus, I am not a Buddhist, just a human being philosophizing, trying to become better at living a life worth living in a world full of beauty as well as stupidity.

The point is, of course, that something outside of me activated

something inside of me. The hostility that was in the air, I breathed it in. However, I forgot to exhale. Let it go. I maintained an artificial difference between me and not me, between inside and outside.

Let me rephrase it: I don't believe that there is one true or authentic me inside. But I do believe that there are better and worse ways of dealing with what happens. It depends on the context. I believe that empathy can help me understand another human being, for example the thoughts and feelings of the bus passenger. Once I become more empathic, I can act differently. Perhaps the passenger was on his way to the hospital to visit his sick wife. Perhaps. Once I understand, I can show compassion and help a person who, quite obviously, was tense and affected. I did not.

It can be easy to find an excuse. Was I beside myself to begin with? Probably. It was a new situation. My parents and nephew were visiting. They don't speak Spanish. I was with my three kids. I was in charge of getting us there on time, of being the organizer, which I am not. Still, this is not it. The challenge is to do better. Become worthy of what happens. I am still trying. Still examining life.

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Recently, Jeppe Hein spoke to me about a new work of his. It's called *Breath*—glass spheres filled with the breath of the artist. The size is determined by his breath's intensity. It raises similar questions like those of the wind. Where does the breath come from? Is it Jeppe Hein's breath that is inside the glass? Or is it just air? Does the air become his once he drags it down into his lungs?

Let me reframe it: Am I being generous because I blow some air out again?

The breath comes from nowhere. No one owns it. Breathing in and out destroys the distinction between either side: in or out.

Looking at Jeppe Hein's *Breath*, it seems obvious that what is inside is also outside, that the two sides mingle. Mashed like potatoes. I can look through the glass. The glass is just an experiment, of course, an examination. It illustrates an illusion. It draws a line where there is none.

Jeppe Hein is both inspired by and practices Buddhism. Here, one seeks to empty the mind in order to return to a clear stillness of what becomes. This is one way of experiencing how everything is connected. One acknowledges the truth of being here only in order to be here. Nothing else. This is a philosophical truth as well. Simplicity seems to be the secret of living a rich life.

Breath is an example of letting go. In Buddhist meditation, the challenge is to let everything go. It may even be a mantra in Jeppe Hein's recent work: to let go. That is, to let go of rigid structures and norms, the distinction between inside and outside. Let go in order to become without any final goal.

Objection, some might scream. Deep down in my body I am full of air, one may claim. Yes. But once you breathe that air into a jar of glass, you realize that you are empty. You can look through it. I am full of emptiness. And it's actually not as sad as it sounds. It gives me plenty of room to become anything at all.

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze talks about "becoming other" as something established by diversity, multiplicity, and the destruction of identity. Destruction of identity, I like that. It aims at bringing "into being that which does not yet exist," as he writes in *Difference and Repetition*.

What does not *yet* exist?

Love. Care. Compassion. These concepts are suffocating. They can hardly breathe. The most powerful never survive; rather, future life depends on our ability to empathize with, to take care of others. Including the angry person we once in a while encounter on the bus.

As the saying goes, we still don't know what our bodies and minds are capable of. I simply assume that I can do better. I am still trying.

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Jeppe Hein's exhibition *All We Need Is Inside* is a contribution to a generous ethic. It proposes that I need to take care of what is outside, because it will get inside. It proposes that I need to be aware of what I pass on to others (or to future generations) because once it is out, it will affect me as well. Deep down and inside, perhaps right behind my heart, are the others. I am constituted or formed by the others.

A Buddhist may say something like negative karma or fate comes from grasping at an illusionary self. It's an illusion because there is no self. We are empty. The self is constantly being formed. Everything is changing.

A generous ethic is a form of constructive organization of one's life with the world. Basically, the advice is not to anticipate the encounters that one has, but to meet the world with an equal interest and engagement for all that happens.

I still don't care about your position. Instead, I propose asking: How might we also act with the world?

The world and I are connected since each encounter activates or enhances my capacity to act in the world, for example being able to engage with the world in new ways. Inside and outside are folded and mingled into one another. I become dizzy just thinking about how infinitely little I am.

Empathy helps me to step inside the body and mind of another person, to see, feel, and understand the world as they do. This knowledge helps me relate. I become aware that the others are inside of me. My hands shake.

When Jeppe Hein says that *All We Need Is Inside*, it's this interconnection that he addresses. It's a statement, as well as a hidden question: *All We Need Is Inside?*

Once you read it, you can't help wondering whether you are perfect. Not perfect according to some fashion ideal or moralism, not according to some certain and idealistic position. No, perfect in the sense that you can act freely, think in a pre-positional way that doesn't give a damn about positions or opposition. All you care about is life. The only thing we have inside is what we all need: life.

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I am tempted to paraphrase one of Eric Fromm's beautiful sentences about love. I propose that selfish and egoistic behavior is caused by a need for the other, because one needs the attention, recognition, status, and identity that others can bestow upon one's shoulders. It's immature. A more mature person knows that they care about the other because the other is part of oneself and vice versa. Everything is connected.

This is not selfishness or narcissism. It's absurd to love myself. *All We Need Is Inside*. Yes. Inside are the others. Life. I am inside you. Now. While you read this. You are inside me while I write this. We mix. Therefore, I care about the others—I care about you—and if I don't, then my hands begin to shake. And I can't write if my hands shake.

Everything is connected.



Illustration: Jeppe Hein, 2015
www.jeppehein.net