

OF A DELICATE INSIGHT | OaDI

On the Subtlety of Moving in Life, and in Neurodivergence

On Behaviour

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**“EACH GLIMMER, an OFFER of COMFORT
& Shelter in Gentleness, *fys*”**



**„JEDER SCHIMMER, eine QUELLE
des WOHLBEFINDENS
& Geborgenheit in Sanftmut, *fds*“**

First of all, let me say that the following words describe my thoughts and ideas and thus are not universally or specifically representative. So, what you make of them is at your good liberty and your discretion! I speak here from my perspective and experience of being a German-born, British person with Asperger's (that was the term used when I received my diagnosis; you may or may not agree with it today. To me it still echoes), ADHD (cf., ADHS), dyscalculia and OCD.

A question I have been asking myself tacitly, gently, far in the background of my mind and life, is one which is profound and perhaps one of those which seem to get asked a lot; which may seem grandiose, and yet one which cannot, perhaps, be answered too easily. Perhaps it is neurodivergent, perhaps it is not. The answer to it is elusive, simultaneously reliant on practice and much reflection, on doing, as much as it relies on the act of thinking and reasoning: *how do I write code into my mind and brain which is not, or seems not, to be there yet?* – Or, to phrase it this way: *how do I encode life (living), and time?*

From my neurodivergent perspective these perhaps obvious, ordinary, grandiose questions are fascinating to me because my mind and I have always grappled with exactly how this life works and how I can get on with it better and more smoothly. That begs the question: what does smoothly mean? I am not sure how a nonneurodivergent mind would think about this or what a nonneurodivergent person would make of it. And hence, this needs must be a *neurodialogue*, rather than a neuro(divergent)monologue. In the end, these thoughts, hopefully, invert the subtleties (the subtext) which weave the complex fabric of neurodivergence and social interaction.

There is much value and strength to be found in *just getting on with it*, to put it more flippantly than the title suggests. What is the secret though, in my feeling machinery, which is the beautiful, ontic engine of my life and time, to doing so? What does it mean when people say *just get on with it?* Or *just do it?* Well, *just to get on with it* is only one reality which can run afoul of a sense of gentle lack of knowledge or awareness of the fact that neurodivergence does come with challenges I, and others, face, i.e., not being able to get on with it as smoothly. My mind, for instance, has the ability to magnify the tiniest, potentially not so significant things into monumental problems: i.e., I create my own barriers and listen to too much (mental) noise. Once I find an easy way of shutting out that (mental) noise, I shall let you know. This is a bit like it is always “easier” from an outside perspective for people to advise others to get over their problems, while compassion and empathy might advise differently though neither pathway is really free of difficulty. When people say such things like *just get on with it*, they say so, I hazard, through their own, and not through a lens of neurodivergence, without a sense of catatonic indecision or a profound feeling of unsurety or being rooted in place. You know, it is hard sometimes to figure out whether it is the neurodivergence, anxiety, my own doing or simply everything put together, which originates this strange problem. How would you deal with feeling rooted in place? If you felt like paralysed or like someone had just thrown a wrench into your

system or locked you in chains and lost the keys and placed weights on your shoulders? I say *gentle lack of knowledge or awareness* because I wish to differentiate consciously between an intentional lack of knowledge whereby people actively remain in the dark or chose to do so, and a lack of knowledge or awareness which is really only present because a person has not yet been properly informed or has not found out for themselves. I can not really fault anyone for that latter form of lacking knowledge or awareness as it is, to an extent, natural. I carry that kind of lacking of knowledge or awareness around with me, too. I think everyone does. It would be ignorant of me to think otherwise – what a twist! I call it *gentle* because it does not seek to do harm. We can not expect everyone to know everything about everyone else at all times and wherever they or we go. That is not possible, which is why we needs must *navigate* social situations. And sometimes we hit the wrong mark. Compassion and empathy, on the other hand, are meant to alleviate that process. That is why we also have apologies though, emendation of whatever went wrong, and appreciation of another’s circumstances. We can learn to appreciate through time, err, then learn again. I think this is sincere when, whenever one does err, one allows for that process to begin anew, to learn anew. In a best case scenario (there is no ideal one) the person feeling wronged would open up to help that other understand. Appreciation sometimes takes or needs time and space. I think the want for instant gratification, for “I appreciate this”, can jarr that process and weigh it down with expectations. Unfortunately, in our culture, I don’t think it is too acceptable to say “I don’t yet appreciate this”, even if, technically it were true, and sincerely meant, at the beginning of that process of understanding. We often “only” say it, because it is polite, I feel.

There are plenty of things I should probably be aware of though I am currently not, or I become aware of them and they slip from my mind due to other commitments in my life. And it will take that special person, who is knowledgable, to come along and point it out to me (again). Or to remind me of things.

Sometimes I wish I could *just get on with it*, and yet, somehow I cannot then find the right next gear, or it seems to me like the transmission of my engine requires said new code or way of functioning which I must first install and learn because no one has installed it so far. This seems to be an essence of my neurodivergence. Working with support, which is necessary for that reason, there are those who support and those who support but leave it to me to figure it out. I appreciate both, though the latter probably more because I learn more by doing things myself, by failing, trying and erring, then by succeeding eventually. That is frustrating because there are times when I would like people to be plain and straightforward with me because that social dance can be challenging and it can feel like a waste of time, too, because it leaves so much room to speculate around what someone might have meant by what they said in a particular situation. The thing about speculating is that it is all kind of hypothetical – uff! Especially in professional situations, plain, clear, socially uncoded language is most helpful, and a patience for a lot of questions! After all, everyone always asks for excellent communication skills. This is not directed at anyone in particular. I do find it important though to

critique this social semantics dance and the expectations of it. Mostly though, I appreciate the threads of the social ways and paths, the intrigue of subtext we all say we love and blindly follow, even if those ways and paths do at times require some knowledge of ice skating! And yet, usually both sorts of people (those who hint and those who direct more openly) cannot write that code for me. The paradoxical thing is, to be neurodivergent, I feel like I sort of need to be the opposite. *What*, you say? – It is a bit of a mind flip. I am, and have been for a while in a position where I expect, or wish of myself to do things without having to seek counsel for everything. That seems to me to be rather contrary to my neurodivergent self, an impression which will require further exploration.

The greatest problem I have is rigorous, paradoxically, almost diligent and conscientious sabotage of my life. Instead of getting on with it, I constantly downplay myself, what I do creatively or what I want or wish to achieve in life. What I want is to feel comfortable. What I need, is to be challenged, and to challenge myself beyond that comfort. It is like I do not trust myself to get to whatever places I wish to reach or that I do not believe that I should, in fact, get there. It is like a kind of continuous social imposter syndrome, so to speak. On the opposite side, of course, I know I can get to those places and achieve what I set out to achieve. I know that because I have done so before. I divert, and seek counsel, avoid, or shy away, I act as a dependant and supportee (one who needs the confirmation of others, constantly), rather than an agent and a collaborator (one who can approach others confidently and act on their own) who has competences, knowledge and valuable insight. Of course, a collaborator can seek counsel, too, and should. Seeking counsel is highly valuable. If I do not know a thing, I ask. It is only that a collaborator does not rely nearly completely on that counsel. A supportee does. On the flip side of this complex coin or blade, because of the overthinking that I do, reaching out and asking for help can then trigger self-loathing: it makes me feel like I am then going backwards because I expect of myself to manage on my own and see asking for help as a u-turn on the goal I set myself, to be independent and autonomous. Beyond the supportee and collaborator problem and sabotage, I seem to be waiting for my life to begin, even though that happened about 30 years ago. Now why is that so? That is a fascinating question. It goes back, perhaps, to the habitual encoding of my ways. Once I got into the habit of worrying about what I say, and downplaying what I do; or using stupid, bullshit humour and sarcasm to deflect or seem interesting or witty; redirecting or weakening the effect of my words and their meaning, it has become very hard to get that sort of thinking and behaviour out of my system. I do so because I am worried about committing, worried that I might be seen as a bit too tall for my own good – which is perhaps a form of ill-placed or ill-advised understatement or humility even; worried about asking too much of the people I meet; worried about delivering because of the information and task deluge that usually triggers. And then I go off and prepare, organise, coordinate and bring home a short film with a crew and cast of fifteen to twenty – it is plainly ridiculous!

It is also presumptuous, of course, of other people and their thinking, and very speculative to worry about what they might or might not really be thinking. To acknowledge that this is a fear of commitment and a fear of delivery is an epistemic act. It does not, in my experience, make the *moving onward in life* part any easier. That still requires transmission of thought into embodiment, or dream into action. I would not underestimate the value and worth of dreaming. Dreaming is the stuff of progression (had somebody not dreamt at some point in history about vehicles moving per motor on four wheels, and had they listened instead to the *voices of the realistic*, we would perhaps not have the thing we now call a *car*, for instance). It is the translation of it which is critical, less the chasing or following of dreams.

There is therefore a conflict of being, of what I know and what I am, what I wish to accomplish or attain and how to embody that. To doubt or downplay this has become a natural part of my mechanics. It is a difficult place in which to live, with high, powerful walls of semi-murky glass; I can see into the walls, through the walls, though it is often hard to tell what exactly lies on the other side. Humour is good, if well placed. Otherwise humor, especially though, sarcasm, just makes me feel stupid and like an idiot – in hindsight – when I wish that I had reacted in a more serious or earnest way, because that is what I wish to be. It feels like I was being less sincere whereas the opposite was the case. I also feel like I did not then honour the person with whom I was in conversation, or that I did not then show them their due respect and courtesy. After all, they gave me their time, whether for a meeting or an informal chat, it does not matter. I have never been a person to take these things lightly. I hold conversation and dialogue in high esteem. Exchange in conversation is profoundly valuable, so to feel like the party who I perceive was being flippant about it, does not feel good, after the fact. And yet, why do I react with sarcasm and humour which will get me nowhere? – Maybe I was and am trying too hard, maybe not hard enough? Insecurity, for one, unsurety about life, doubt and a sort of dissonance with life, I figure, that is what makes me feel like this is a dream – a strange waking dream. It is an inherent wish of mine to make every interaction meaningful, deep and a lasting, beautiful memory. Perhaps so much so, that I wish for the smallest, shortest interactions to reach some sort of philosophical depth? Should things not have meaning and be serious? Of course, I enjoy a bit of banter and often we talk a whole host of nonsense when we interact. Are my expectations too high, often? Not of people, but of myself and how I should interact with others and how I should engage. I wish to do good by people, which contrasts how my brain at times allows me to react, or how I react.

At a perceived 30% (my whimsical figure) mental capacity, which is variable, it is not easy to hold the mental tension I need in order to respond and answer in a way which is befitting the respect other people deserve and the offering of which I expect of myself. For that reason (the feeling at 30%) I need to process after the fact. Courtesy goes a long way, so not feeling like I'm showing it when I wish to show it is difficult and challenging. Not hitting the subtle marks which I often see coming or unfolding, and yet perhaps take too long to recognise, makes it hard. Learning them and hitting them is an aspect of life, though. Moments are ephemeral, beautiful, but also, at times, devastating and cruel as

they come, unfold and are gone – and they cannot be easily repeated. Perhaps trying to repeat them is folly, and building up towards new ones better. Lost opportunities gnaw at my mind. It makes living in the moment difficult. Yet I have observed myself paradoxically as living in the moment so much so that the overall picture has now and then gone amiss. My brain and I need time to warm up to new situations and people. It means though that when the moment is gone and when everyone else is going home, my engines are just about fired up and ready to roll. It is one of the most frustrating parts of being me. And so I find there lives a great and difficult need to build an intense drive in me, an immense push, a sudden burst of *will to move* through the threads of my mind. It helps me to power up and move through the hurdles which frustrate my mind – and, consequently, my living and time. It is like looking into a mirror and bringing to myself the understanding and comprehension that not all is going well, or that some things may (or had better) be improved, and that I need to be kicked into action (even if I do so myself). It is a kind of deeply and often anguishing self-exacting (em)power(ment). Mind, especially in the interfering dialogue of OCD, gentle or harsh, stringent or relenting, concerning all my conditions in fact, that kind of exacting or exerting drive is often, at times, the apparently only way to move; to act like a freight train, to push and plough through the noise and thus find momentum while balancing on the edge of a well sharpened blade. The tension induced by that kind of momentum and power does, however, amplify the condition. Therein lies the conflict and the dance which I must learn and conduct: when to push, when to relent, when to be strict and when to be gentle in my conduct towards myself and my mind. I can also be fairly impatient with myself, and it is because of this that I ask myself to contemplate and consider the nature of my neurotypology and whether it is working well with and for me. Patience is more complex, not simple, neither absolute nor constant and at times I ask myself what the true nature of patience in fact is. It is very relative, I have found. The compassion and patience which I seek to offer other people, and I hope I do, I then often do not offer to myself. The difficult part, the ramified part, is that it is an illusion that this kind of tension only affects me. It can seep and branch out, radiate – not maliciously, of course, not willfully – but subtly. We then call that state being annoyed or in a bad mood, often disparagingly or disagreeingly (as if being in a good mood is the only valuable thing whereas understanding and dealing with the “bad mood” is important). That is too simple in my mind and belies the more profound mechanics of those particular mental states. It is not pleasant. Whoever, though, said that problems with mental health or the conversation around it, had to be pleasant? It is not a case of life is (not) this or that, either. It is a case of acknowledging first of all the nature of the subject we here observe. Then we can go deeper and study it, learn about it and find, hopefully, a more profound dignity in our understanding of it.

It does feel good though to kick myself into a better gear. To wander through life with this kind of a constant internal push and feel that way, is not a nice feeling and it will, at last, make its own case to adjust my approach. On the other hand there is then also a need and call for more gentleness and appreciation of my own situation and circumstance which is difficult at times to accomplish. This

constitutes a conflict of my seeking more dynamic ways and my being, at heart, a no-nonsense person, and dealing with the dissonant orchestra of emotional upheaval which accompanies my experience. Is this need for an exacting, exerting drive an absolute aspect of my nature? No, it is not. It is transient and ephemeral. It is more profoundly an aspect of the feeling machinery, the contemplation and rendition of thought about which offers dignity. It is one side of many sides, or strings, played in what feels like a subtly monumental internal balancing act. It must be a molecular technique, a fierce glimmer, angry enough to pass through the noise, and yet measured so as to settle again. In the best case, this is a moment's action, a moment's process of progression. That momentum is fragile, too, though. The slightest interference can undermine it – depending on the situation and the stability which I manage to weave in my mind. It is also deeply difficult to write about this because for me it is such a challenging and razor sharp subject, perhaps easily misconstrued. It is a tricky sort of vulnerability. Not to write about it though would neglect the necessity of my observing the deeper fabrics of this theme of my neurodivergence and mental health.

The interplay of my conditions and my neurodivergence itself is by nature (cf., *von Natur aus*) a mental barrier of such subtlety that it amounts to a monumental struggle. It is a mental barrier into the heart of who I am as a person, to living and life. Not only is it that to my mind, but to the nonneurodivergent mind of those with whom I engage, too. Theoretically, strip a neurodivergent individual outwardly of their neurodivergence, and what remains is a person. Is this obvious? A person with whom we might engage and who, like me, might be able to move through the subtleties of life and living. Is this really obvious? I feel like I have said this a lot, but it occurred to me again as one of those neat little sentiments which hold their own subtle truth. *To encode life (living), and time* therefore is a dance with faith, and can feel like a blind step into darkness with the terrible courage to navigate that darkness; to explore and figure out what feels like the hazes and fogs, the fragrances and textures which constitute its form and realm. I navigate. I navigate, because somewhere there is a foundation! There is a glimmer of compassion and understanding for the world, in the beauty and in the interferences. It can simply feel so minute and molecular at times that I miss it in the noise of the critical, doubting voices which speak and whisper to me along the way. And sometimes, influenced by the noise, it is hard to feel compassion or have the patience to allow it to unfold. I listen and search for those good voices. I reconcile them with the darkness. I am constantly trying to find ways to get my brain to transfer thought, wishes and intention(s) into action, and all of that while my transmission system seems to be jamming. Have you ever been in a manual car and accidentally jammed the gears or got your clutch routine wrong? Have you ever scraped a fork over porcelain or nails down a blackboard? It is not a nice feeling and sound. So imagine that feeling and sound when you think *just get on with it*. It does not happen everytime, but it happens plenty of times. It is not easily predictable either, or it takes an immense amount of focus and attention to become aware of it and hold that awareness – the awareness of when my brain will jam. It is another exercise to learn how to navigate that jamming and develop techniques and methods of smooth navigation. This screeching feeling and

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sound is hellishly frustrating and also a source of feeling incompetent because I feel that to other people *just getting on with it* is the most obvious thing in the world. Maybe that is a presumptuous impression on my part, too, because I know that other people's lives are not straightforward. However, it seems to me that there are people who get up and get on with it; they move into, and through life, with an apparent ease of transmission. Perhaps the comparison to others is nonsensical. I do though admit that I tend to get lost in my own darkness at times and in the noise. I am a dramatic, theatrical thinker. Whether to apologise for that, I do not really know (yet). Dramatic and theatrical thinking aids my creative practice, so I really should not apologise, should I? It is like the question when which behaviour is best fitting (Hill, 2023, pp.3-4). Since art and creative practice draws inspiration from life and inspires life, so should I not think dramatically and theatrically? After all, it is within my nature.

Yet, I feel like a machine, at times, a comparison which, somewhere, makes sense to me. It is *an emotional, a machine(ry) which feels – a feeling machinery* (cf., *empfindende, fühlende Maschine(rie)*), figuratively (cf., *im übertragenen Sinne*). I love to be deliberately playful with meanings and thought and a humorous self-dehumanisation felt like the way to go this time. Then again, since the human body is full of all sorts of biological, neurological and other mechanisms, we could, by extension, speak of a kind of machinery. A colleague of mine actually used to call me a *robot*, though more in allusion to my being quite straightforward and getting on with it. They did not, at the time, know I am neurodivergent though. I smile at it nowadays. It makes me happy to remember it – a bit of fun in good faith. You might have noticed that I just said, *my [...] getting on with it*. The whole thing is more layered and subtle than absolute thinking (e.g., either ... or) would permit. I have been learning to be relative in my thinking, and go by situation, mood, mental and memory capacity, and what my (our) part is in the situation of which I am (we are) partaking. None of these factors are fundamental reasons not to uphold commitments, if there is a chance to plough through them, and often I feel that the whole neurodivergence and mental health complex cannot stand in the way of progression and movement – even to the point of saying *right now, I have to get on with it, whether I have a condition or not*. You have to get to that place in your life first, though, to be able to perform and be flexible. To some this might come easier or more smoothly than to others. Each factor will, however, ultimately yield a slight variation of ability and transmission of thought into action and performance; to calibrate my dramatic, theatrical school of thought to a more subtle approach; that it may aid me in my creative practice, and yet not get in the way of my life and living – even, that is, if life and living infuses creative practice and creative practice, in turn, teaches life and living. In neurodivergence, I have learnt I must play the good old long game, not the short one.

All in good time and in its good place we might find good judgement and attain movement.

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