



Kim Jong-Il orz

Description

Avoided the crime images and deleted wails of the North Korean nation mourning the death of its leader izens enacting the customary orz posture and gestures ([YouTube](#)).



â??Orz,â?• with variants, is of course an emoticon popular in

Japan, South Korea, China and elsewhere used to indicate humility, despair, sorrow, submission, shame, and regret. When spoken, the text sequence is generally pronounced â??oh ar zee,â?• and represents a human body on all fours in profile. If further explanation is needed: the â??oâ?• is a head, the â??râ?• is the arms, and the â??zâ?• is the folded legs.

This is a customary submissive posture parodied in *Orientalist* theatre. Stage directions in Gilbert and Sullivanâ??s *The Mikado* require Koko and Pitti-Sing to drop to their faces before the Mikado, followed by some slapstick as the dignified and bulky Pooh-Bah tries to do the same.

The contexts in which it is deployed may be different, but *orz* is a posture that creates unease wherever it occurs. I recall being at a meeting where the somewhat important chairperson crawled on all fours under a table to retrieve some papers. Others were uncomfortable and darted to assist. Perhaps the *orz* posture suggests a return to the state of an animal â??obliged to walk with faces to the groundâ?• (Vitruvius, p.38). It is however a posture that can assume dignity, as when Pope John Paul II would kiss the tarmac on disembarking at an airport.

A couple of questions arise from the spectacle of North Korea in mourning.

1. What is the relationship between feeling and action? There is the charge that the grief is not real, but play acting, a demonstration created under duress. How does this square with the philosopher [William James](#)'s insight that actions and feelings cannot be so easily separated? A person doesn't get on hands and knees, wail, bend to-and-fro and beat the ground BECAUSE they feel sorrowful. We could just as easily assert that people feel sorrowful BECAUSE they so assume this posture and beat the ground; or perhaps without the gesture the reception of the event (the mourning) would be "pale, colourless, destitute of emotional warmth," to quote James. The question of sincerity lingers, but it is a question we would probably not be asking were it not for the extreme grief displays captured on camera.
2. Do groups, crowds and nations feel something independently of what an individual feels? Is there such a thing as a collective emotion? Here we can appeal to the idea of a [mood](#) or atmosphere that provides the context for personal feelings. This atmosphere is perhaps the *Stimmung*, or social attunement, a prerequisite for whatever emotion we claim. The concept of a corporate mood looks perilously close to Mao Tsetung-style collectivism ("the individual is subordinate to the organization"). But the idea that the mood of a people might be manipulated highlights further its importance as a pre-requisite for feeling.

After all, *'tis the season to be jolly*. The season of joy requires, or imposes, a collective mood. Festivals invite participation or resistance. Without the season there'd be little to claim by way of an emotion, unless I'm humbly mistaken orz.

Bibliography

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Category

1. Body

Tags

1. affect
2. atmosphere
3. bodies
4. body
5. emotion
6. festival
7. Mikado
8. mood
9. North Korea
10. orz

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