Steffi Hofer

Eyebody – Contact within a Space

How we find ourselves physically expanded through our gaze

1 Where we begin

The basis of our work in voice and speech training is the recognition of symptoms and their causes.

Dealing with the identified deviations in body posture, breath regulation, and impromptu speaking, necessitates first being aware of them.

The gaze of the individual and the manner with which we look both contribute to a resonance effect – or to the repression of resonance – between myself and the other.

Resonance effect or Being Present is a skill that exists within us all.

Being Present reveals itself when I am in contact with myself and the other within the same moment. We spread ourselves out within this surrounding space[1].

However our Presence is often shrouded by obstructive habits.

The sociologist Dr. Galen Cranz[2], in this year's joint Eyebody-Training, described misaligned presence as follows: It is either shrouded by one of two curtains, overfocus[3] or underfocus[4], but generally Presence is always available. The causes that trigger an impairment of our presence must be acknowledged before we work on personal expression.

2 Contact – Surrounding Space

The intent to make contact with a person, an audience, and the surrounding space, *first* requires contact with myself. This only happens with awareness of how I am breathing and how physically tense I am. I experience myself within a space. Important for the contact is

[1] The term surroundings as per Thomas Fuchs denotes possibilities and valences of the same and does not mean physical forms.

[2] Dr. Galenz Cranz, Professor of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley

[3] The term Overfocus in the Eyebody Method® denotes a high tension in concentration, which is comparable to holding on to certain circumstances.

[4] *The term Underfocus in the EyebodyMethod® denotes reduced attention for the circumstance in question*.

whether there will actually be communication once again, rather than what will be disccussed. This is why, for instance, the structural-functional body work in Martin Gruber's[5] actor training begins with:

"The struggle with the "I" stands in the center, the fine tuning of inner and outer factors, the search for one's own limits when spreading out, without giving justification or having to consider the other"[6]

I can possibly achieve contact with the inner and the outer with an awareness for the Panoramic View.[7] The panoramic view allows me to be in a wider viewing field, now that I can include the left and right fields in my view. My front eye part relaxes, the vitreous body does not push forward any more.[8] Thus I am not considering things in a state of overfocus. This is when my first expansion occurs.

Simultaneously I find contact to my axis[9] - the spinal cord in the spinal column - which has optimal contact with the brain as a result of bodily expansion. The awareness of the back side of my body provides mental and physical stability.

Now contact is easier for me, since I have some distance to the end-point and am not in a state of overfocus. The spine, with its spinal cord, represents the central point of the body. It is flexible in its build, thus allowing our bodies to go into a state of expansion.

Fuchs describes the relationship of the body to its surrounding space as being a polar relationship.

"Each pole is what it is because of the other; and both are articulated by each other through bodily orientations".[10]

Gruber describes the widespread problematic of overfocus and underfocus using the following exercise in his essay "Forming Forms, Destroying Forms".

An example for concentration and the power of imagination is the well-known exercise of the "inflexible arm".

If a student places his outstretched arm in a relaxed way on the shoulder of his partner and concentrates on some point beyond his outspread fingertips, it is impossible for the partner to bend his arm.

As soon as the student however wants to be strong and clenches his muscles, or simply relaxes and drops his focus on the imaginary point, the arm can immediately be bent.[11]

Gruber thus shows the effect of the imagination and also simultaneously the negative effects of over-concentration and under-concentration, which I name – as Grunwald[12] does – overfocus and underfocus.

[5] Martin Gruber is Professor for Movement at the College for Acting "Ernst Busch"

[6] from: Gruber, Martin, Forming forms, Destroying Forms in Acting-Training, Berlin *2010, Pos. 2720 (cited from the e-book version)*

[7] The term Panoramic-View in the Eyebody Method® denotes the softened or broad view, which includes the left and right viewing fields.

[8] Cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

[9] for Grunwald, the spinal cord describes the axis of our body, since this is where the functional neural connections to our brain are found

[10] from: Fuchs, Thomas, Leib, Raum, Person, Stuttgart 2000, p.120

[11] Cf. Gruber, Pos. 2007 (cited from the e-book version)

[12] Peter Grunwald developed the EyebodyMethod®

We must ‘see’ in which direction our intent should point. This ‘seeing’ is primarily linked to the imagination and not to the tensing of the front eye. Here, the relaxed visual pathway is used to achieve the goal. Since the visual pathway passes through all three brains (the brain stem, the limbic brain, and the neocortex), the relaxing of the front eye has an effect on our thinking.[13]

The ability to expand oneself wholly; to be there; to find the path to the other, gives us the option to act from the metaplane. Engagement and expansion occurs via exhalation.[14]

The line I want to describe through my contact-making, begins in my visual cortex[15] and ends at a point with which I have something to negotiate – this can be an object, a person, or a situation.

If this line is not there, then I am not engaged enough with the situation through my intents. I hold on tight to behavior patterns and am bound to the social forms and expectations of the other. The starting-point, the “I”, is missing.

The actor who does not perceive if his position relative to his colleagues has changed, does not have real spatial awareness; he can never respond. He waits until the other actor stops, and then speaks his part.[16]

Positively expressed this means, according to Feldenkrais, contact can only succeed if the “I” experiences a change through the other. In Hegelian terms, this means the existence of I is thanks to the Other.

I am because you are.[17]

Hustvedt summarizes Hegel’s conditions of being through this simplified form.

3 Seeing and the lines – periphery or narrowness

Alongside the other senses, the visual system directs our thinking, our imagination, and our orientation during negotiation. In early childhood, the motor skills of our hand develop as our vision is steered in specific directions – the child learns to gesture at, or reach for, an object in a goal-oriented way. This development expresses itself on the somatic plane in the interrelationship between the hand and the optic nerve sheath. According to Grunwald, our hand has a relationship to the optic nerve sheath. This explains why, in our development, we first communicate with gestures, before we operate verbally. The motor function of the hand develops parallel to the motor function of the eyes. The visual gesture - like every gesture – has adirection and expressive power, says Snell.[18]

The same applies to the imagination. Intent leads to concrete imagination - and therefore to the goal. The tennis player Serge Percelly describes his game with this:

I could clearly see where the ball would go without having to fixate on it.

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[13] Cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

[14] from: Hofer, Steffi, Das handelnde Sprechen, Bochum 2013, p. 136

[15] Cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

[16] *from*: Feldenkrais, Moshé, Verkörperte Weisheit, Berkeley CA 2010, p. 110

[17] from: Hustvedt, Siri, A Woman looking at Man looking at Woman, London 2016, p. 369

[18] from: Waldenfels, Bernhard, Antwortregister, Frankfurt am Main 2007, p. 497

You must visualize a point where you see a little of everything.[19]

The manner in which we see, or look, determines our perception.

Waldenfels, in his study “Response Relationships” refers to how the exchange of a handshake is similar to an exchanged look.[20]

Perception and thought are already movements in space and have a direction.

The breath plays a central role here, as it mediates between body and surrounding space.

I relate to something with my breath. However, I know through my readiness *in what way* I make myself available to it.

The fundamental experience, which we make through the breath, is taking in and giving out. [21]We experience the same with our sight. Sight and Breath step in to interact with the surrounding space. Sight is also influenced through the volume of breath, both processes are in an interrelationship. This interrelationship results from the fact that the entire front eye[22] is bound to our upper body, including the chest, lungs, and diaphragm.[23]

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In accordance with my intent, I describe a line in the space between the „I“, where the line begins and the end-point, the goal of my intention. My intent describes itself through my bodily tension, my glance, and the breath.

On the other hand, Focusing - or according to Fuchs, active perception - constricts the body. The periphery is not included, and I move myself in a manner that is limited to one point. The perception in the surroundings forms itself based on the three-dimensional periphery, and I am in a position to select from this entire whole and give a response.

However, the limitedness of the view results in a limitedness of the body. Per-

[19] from: Wilson, Frank, R., Die Hand – Geniestreich der Evolution, New York, 1998, p. 117

[20] Cf. Waldenfels, p. 514

[21] Cf. Waldenfels, p. 118

[22] This results in pressure on the Nervus Vaus (10th cranial nerve), cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

[23] Cf. www.eyebody.com

ception in the Moment is limited. Apperception[24] is not possible.

As a result, the response to the experience is also limited. body.

Our body responds with a constricted chest, the neck becomes short and inflexible.[25] For Feldenkrais, a restricted rotation of the cervical spine is the cause for a restricted rotation of the lower central axis.[26]

The shortened neck results in an inflexible pelvis and thus impairs the relaxed jaw. No further expansion is possible. When I find myself in an optimal response relationship to the other, inhaled breath comes in an optimal form, because I am receptive - and resonance[27] follows from it. It extends and expands our body. I answer the situation by breathing, the only substance that reveals me.[28]

4 AIKIDO

The Aikido training at our university[29] is essential for contact training for our theater students. Here you learn the necessity of having to first create yourself, says Claudia Heu. The students are available to make contact, and at the same time are in a position to defend themselves. They learn to see lines as an extension of their body, which they generate with the help of their eyes, and with movement.

The decisive point is the broad view. The students are asked to include the periphery in the room. Once again there arises a contact with the axis.

Only when I genuinely begin in the axis, can I successfully become ready to react adequately.

5 The lines in the body

Apart from the lines between the “I” and the surrounding space, we also describe lines within our bodies. Just as the “I” is manifested through “You”, the movement of body parts are manifested through each other.

In the following, I would like to discuss three lines:

5.1 Visual cortex – Feet

To be in the axis also means being more easily aware of my visual cortex. The visual cortex is in the back part of our brain.[30]

Conscious seeing from the visual cortex, brings the visual pathway and the front eye into an economized state of tension.

This has the effect, as already mentioned, of allowing our back to spread out.[31] In the Eyebody-Relationship-Patterns®[32], the visual cortex has a relationship with the feet.

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[24] As per Leibnitz, Apperception denotes the (re)processing of attention and memory

[25] Cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

[26] Cf. Feldenkrais, p. 43

[27] In this context, resonance means the possible expansion of the swinging between the starting and ending point – this can also happen without voice or articulation

[28] from: Boston, Jane; Cook, Rena, Breathing in Acting, London 2009, p. 212

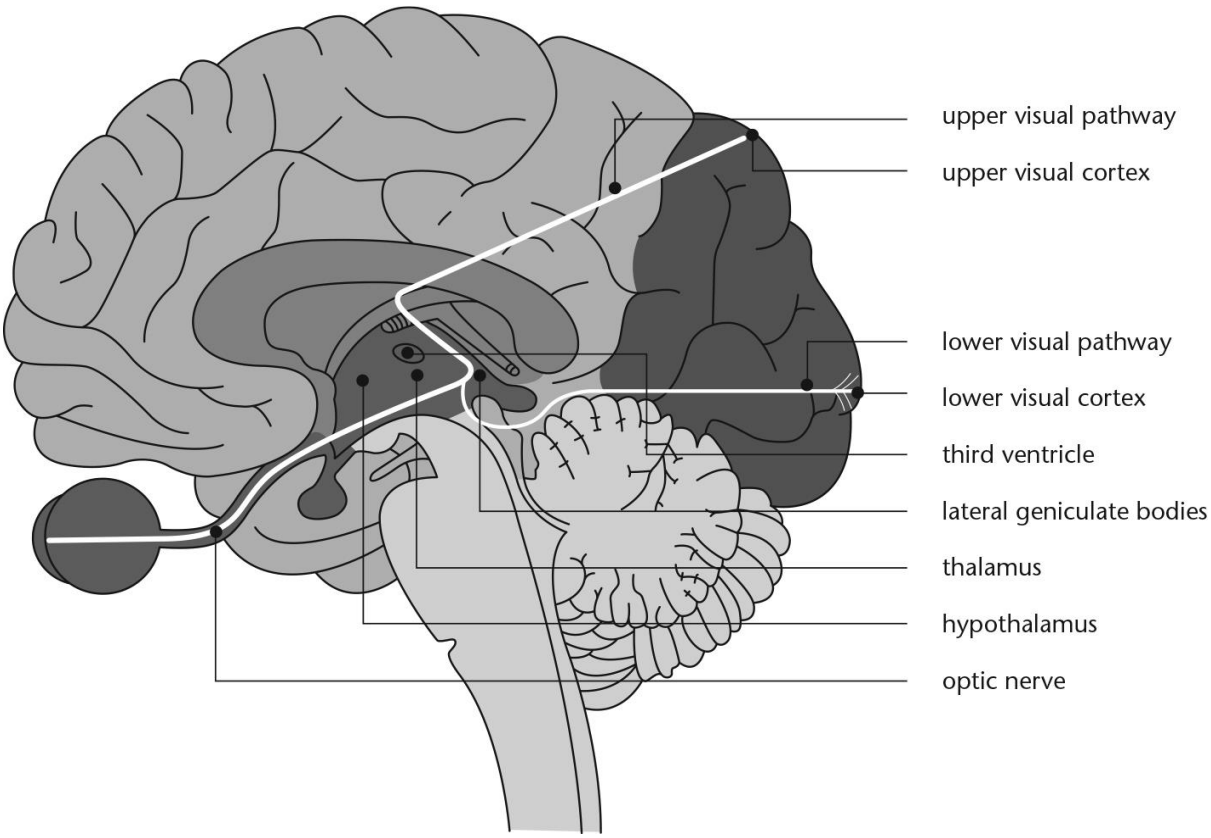
[29] Music and Arts University of the City of Vienna, MUK

[30] Cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

[31] Cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

[32] The Eyebody-Relationship-Patterns® as per Grunwald describe the interrelationship between visual pathway and body

The upper visual pathway & the lower visual pathway (represented by white lines) and their parts



This describes the longest line in the posterior zone of the body that is efficient for the students. On the one hand they activate their imagination with this, on the other hand following the steps - through the senses - contributes to the personal structuring of texts. Parallel to that, the back extends itself, which stabilizes our posture and promotes breathing capacity.

Feedback from the Eyebody Workshop

Conscious work with the eyes, especially with the visual cortex, made me skeptical at first, but over time my interest has been piqued, as I have seen clear differences in the other participants “before and after successful activation”. These differences primarily concerned the presence of the person, supported by breath and voice. Breath and voice were, in turn, decisively improved by the eye work.

2nd year acting student, MUK[33]

Also, the experience of actually seeing someone in the eye, "activating the visual cortex," is something to be overcome or achieved, but then I am much more protected because I can - so to speak - relax within myself, not have to prove anything to the

[33] Cf. 26

other, to show myself, and not have the feeling of having to give something up to the partner.

4th year acting student, MUK

5.2 Sphenoid and pelvis

If our pelvic bone is flexible, the breath fills us up. An optimal forward tilting movement extends the lower back and allows an optimal volume of breath intake. The flexibility of the pelvic bone allows the sphenoid to move – and vice versa. We can assume an interrelationship here. The flexibility of the sphenoid facilitates the economical tensing of the eye band[34] and allows us to have a broad view. Conversely, we can assume that the broad view has an economizing influence on the eye band and the sphenoid.

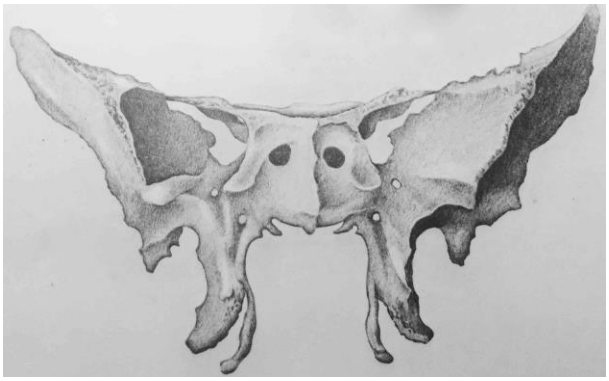
The eye band rises from the nasal bridge, goes across the eye sockets, runs above the ears, and closes off at the backside of the skull, above the out er edge of occipital bone.[35] Here the eye band touches the superficial back line[36], which runs down the entire back side of our body, starting at the forehead. As a result, an over-tensing of the eye part does not just affect the superficial back line[37], but can also be in an interchanging tension-transfer relationship with the eye band.

In order to resolve existing stresses using vision, consciousness of the panoramic view is rewarding since the front eye will not overfocus. Also some of the individual skull bones will become more flexible.

Our skull bones are not in a fixed position, but movable at the seams. This is why the eye sockets along with the sphenoid and cheekbones are interrelated in their state of tension.

Interesting to note here is the similarity in the shapes of the sphenoid and pelvic bones.

In the Eyebody- Method® Grunwald speaks of an interrelationship between the retina, the pelvis, and the lower back. With line-seeing[39] I can sense the flexibility of the pelvis, in that I place two fingers on the iliac crest. Grunwald's thesis on this interrelationship has been supported by researchers such as Schulz and Feitis. They also posit that the inflexibility of the sphenoid or the pelvic affects the inflexibility of the others.



Sphenoid, Illustration by Charles Ramsburg [38]

[34] The term eyeband denotes the seventh horizontal fascial band

[35] from: Myers, Thomas, W., Anatomy Trains, Myofasziale Leitbahnen, München 2010, p. 325

[36] Vertical fasciae 37

[37] Cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

[38] from: Johnson, Don, The Protean Body, New York, Hagerstown, San Fransisco, London 1977, cover

[39] Basic exercise of the Eyebody Method®, I shift from far-off, to nearby, by using a line, cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

„In fluid body movement sphenoid and pelvis move in concert and reciprocally. If one doesn't move, the other is inhibited in the movement, as has been demonstrated in Sutherland's cranial osteopathic work."[40]

The experiences with line-seeing as well as the purposeful openness for the panoramic view leads to a relaxation of the eye band, which has an influence on the flexibility of the sphenoid and pelvic bones.

From this it follows that Being-Ready begins with me. First, I produce myself for the other. This is achieved through my gaze and the associated physical permeability.

Feedback from the Eyebody-Workshop

What I got out of this is line-seeing and panoramic view. In the case of purposeful line-seeing, I breathe more deeply and get more air and am then much more focused and alert. Through the panoramic view I experience a larger openness when dealing with myself and my environment.

4th year acting student, MUK

Put another way, I could also say that breath describes me.[41]

The vision leads, the body follows. And so leads our imagination.

5.3 Cornea (cornea) and thorax (thoracic cavity)

The cornea is the foremost layer of the front eye and thus the first layer to receive rays of light. This already shows a receptiveness for surroundings and communication. A light pressure on the front eye limits my behavior and impairs incidental light rays. This tension is in the neck and is shown through a light stiffening. This stiffening is sufficient to impair our resonance-spaces.

A further interaction, which Grunwald describes in the framework of relationship patterns, is the one between chest and cornea. This interrelationship is especially interesting for speech training:

If the cornea is overstretched - for example caused by overfocusing - the chest caves in. The tightening of the cornea makes the expansion of the chest impossible. This can be felt quite easily with two fingers on the upper chest.

Correspondingly, it can be *observed*, that the front eye part expands itself parallel to an expanding chest. The result is, I am ready for my counterpart.

Feedback from the Eyebody-Workshop

For me, most conversations were, and still are, heavily you-oriented. 'My conversation partner pulled me out of myself.' This sentence has taken on an entirely different dimension for me.

Presence has for me a lot to do with courage. Whoever wants to be present, must trust oneself outside of oneself, and let life melt on the retina. The vision-dance and the sight-line-seeing were, and still are, my favorites. They

[40] from: Schultz, Louis, R.; Feitis, Rosemarie, The endless web, Fascial anatomy and Physical Reality, California 1996, p. 70

[41] Cf. Hofer, Steffi (2015), pp. 42–57

have helped me expand my field of view considerably, without stressing my eye.

2nd year student – Musical Theater student, MUK

This week, I was able to experience that by "relaxing" my eyes (with the relaxation of jaw muscles and other muscles in the body, especially noticeable in the upper body), my self-assurance strengthened. The less I try to focus someone with my eyes (strained), the more open I remain, the more self-conscious I am. The so-called panorama view triggers a warmth in my body and, at the same time, an inner calm. This way, my breath flows as if by itself and it feels like my body is freshly lubricated.

4th year acting student, MUK

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4th year acting student, MUK

6 Conclusion: Inner and outer contact is movement

Each part of the body is related to the other, and so the flexibility of one emerges from the other.

In the moment during which our body parts are in a seamless exchange, we are once again capable of an expansion - with our breath and with being upright in an economized manner. A body which can expand itself describes at least three lines with six directions in space.

The verticals describe the line which expands us upwards and downwards.

The second line extends towards the frontal direction, which describes negotiation, as well as its complementary direction in order to find the counterweight for bodily tension. Furthermore there is a horizontal line that goes right and left, which emerges through the expansion of the thorax and the face's field.

In order to be in Presence, the vertical, the horizontal, and the directed orientations are all simultaneously required. A blocked body cannot expand itself.

Only when I can maintain the expansion, in order to change directions without losing meaning, am I in the awareness of my Self.[42]

And here begins contact. If we assume that contact is movement, then a flow between starting-point and end-point becomes identifiable.

It comes down to an exchange. The Other, or the End-point, pulls me out of me.

[42] Cf. Gruber, Pos. 2762 (cited from the e-book version)

Thoughts are exchanged from the I and from the You.

About

Steffi Hofer is a graduate in speech sciences and clinical sciences. She is currently working as a professor in the Department of Drama and Musical Theater at MUK (Music and Arts Private University of the City of Vienna) and is a research associate at the Institute for Science and Research of MUK on the subject of contact and space.

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