
sprechen

Zeitschrift für Sprechwissenschaft
Sprechpädagogik – Sprechtherapie – Sprechkunst

Special print

Steffi Hofer:

Eyebody – Contact within a Space II

How we can create spaces through our gaze, our hands and our speech

Steffi Hofer

Eyebody® – Contact within a Space II

**How we can create spaces through our gaze, our hands
and our speech**

Contact, Perception and Imagination.

Seeing, not seeing, looking, not looking,
perceiving, capturing, extending clearly
defined lines, leaving behind traces - I

The way in which seeing has the possibility of making contact within a space was possibly first described by Plato in his essay Alcibiades I.

In the following article I would like to introduce the conditions for contact and the associated ability to be able to extend out into a space. Within that, the use of the visual process gives me useful answers for my work in speech training.

WHY?

The visual process and the visual pathway are involved in the coordination of brain and body. In such a way, our gaze is available in intrapersonal space as well as the space around us and is thus a basis for our ability to perceive.

To be in a physical space, to be with others, means to start from the gaze; to perceive or capture something. I draw spaces around me and let presence arise.

In my first article “Eyebody® - Contact within a Space”, which appeared in this magazine in 2017, I thematized that contact or presence is always dependent on two sides.

PAUL VALERY

“We don’t see what we see, rather we see what the Seen lets us expect. [...] It acts, and it will be seen as a result of this action. Perception is therefore production, that has been triggered by something [...]”¹

Paul Valery supports these findings and assumptions in his Aphorisms in a poetic way. He refers in this context to the synergy of imagination and perception.

In his treatise *Body, Space, Person*, Thomas Fuchs also introduces that “imagination is already part of perception.”²

Perception and imagination play a central role in the following article. Both proces-

¹ Valery, Paul (2011) I graze on the meadow of my mind, Pg 233

² see Fuchs, Thomas, (1999) *Body, Space, Person*

ses are based to a substantial extent on information from the tactile and visual system.

I understand perception to be the result of processed information. Imagination on the other hand describes the reactivation of perception-representation.

Perception and imagination are essential for the ability to deliberately act and get involved in something, in order to be heard when speaking. Perception is something active, and shows up among other things in the use of the hands, in our seeing, as well as in speaking.³

All three processes extend us into the space.⁴ They draw lines in us and around us. These lines arise from the polarity between the

I and the surrounding space and the resulting bodily directions (see 2017 Article).

FEEDBACK FROM THE PRESENCE WORKSHOP 2018

One must make contact, to be with oneself, to go out from oneself, and with that create the foundation of all possible relationships.

(Acting graduate, MUK)

METHODOLOGY

My starting point will be to compare the over-focussed gaze with the wider view⁵. I work methodically with the awareness of peripheral vision, based on the Eyebody Method® of Peter Grunwald.⁶

³ Fuchs, pg 169

⁴ Hofer (2018) The Acting Speech, pg. 44

⁵ see Hofer, Sprechen magazine, Issue 59, 63 (2015/2017)

⁶ Grunwald, Peter (2007) Eyebody, the Integration of Eye, Brain and Body.

CONTACT

What do we mean by contact? The word contact is derived from the Latin *contactus/contingere* which means to touch.⁷ Contact is therefore something active and lively, which moves and changes.

Contact is equivalent in some ways to perception. According to Thomas Fuchs, perception is already an action and thus a response to being addressed.

One part of our daily work in Speech training for performing artists is the work of actual contact. The gaze shows its polarity in the body tension of the one seeing. Thereby it is justifiable to go out from that, so that the gaze carries something physical outwards. With others there is information through bodily tension and volume of breath.

Estera Stenzel, professor of Basics and Acting education at the MUK in Vienna, formulated the link between perception and reaction in Space as follows:

Acting functions by observation, so by the exact 'outward seeing'.. This looking outward will be conditioned by subjective perception. One looks, and one discovers. One discovers something real or imagined. One assesses the Seen and one reacts. One reacts while one acts. The action will be carried out in a space. The space is a recipient of the acting, as a glass is a recipient of liquid. The liquid leaves traces in the glass, as the acting leaves traces in the space.

As I see it, it is the physical and mental state of mind which determine how I

⁷ Kluge (2017) Etymological Dictionary

leave traces in the space. Seeing thus already shows a reaction.

In her latest interview in Die Zeit about her function as Jury President of Berlin International Film Festival 2019, Juliette Binoche said:

“[...] as they came into my living room, we made eye contact, and that therefore decided whether we were really here together or not.”

Zeit: “How important is the eye contact with the directors?”

Binoche: “More important than speaking, directors and actors actually hardly ever talk to one another.”⁸

THE SPACE

ERWIN HEERICH:

Space is in Space
And that is unending

The architect Erwin Heerich shows with this statement, which refers to the Meseuminsel Hombroich, the influences of inner to outer spaces or to the interrelationship with each other. All those who work with resonance can recognise the parallels straight away. It behaves similarly with our oral cavity and the resonance spaces, that is the intrapersonal spaces and the spaces around us.

The speaking process is due to its directionality a space-related process. That there is no speaking without acting is

described by the Speech Act theory of Austin and Searle as well as by the “Gestural Speech” method of Bertold Brecht. It follows then that we show our directions in space with our actions. These directions arise from seeing and showing. We define the end-point of the directions as resistances. These resistances are essential for the physical tension in the space and are as a result an essential component in the education of stage performers.

Thomas Fuchs describes the mouth as the first space into which we expand. We explore it by means of the tongue and experience limitations, which are equivalent to resistances. The infant experiences how this space opens up, fills and empties. The infant recognises the surrounding space. The eye assists the hand in this connection. Parallel to this is the grasping of the surroundings with the hand and the gaze.

For the philosopher Merleau-Ponty, the I represents the zero point in the space. The surrounding space is experienced from this zero point out. The zero point can be experienced when I am aware of myself, or to put it another way, when I perceive myself.

The gaze, my way of seeing, influences the awareness considerably. This is a prerequisite for the expansion in space and the ability to make contact.

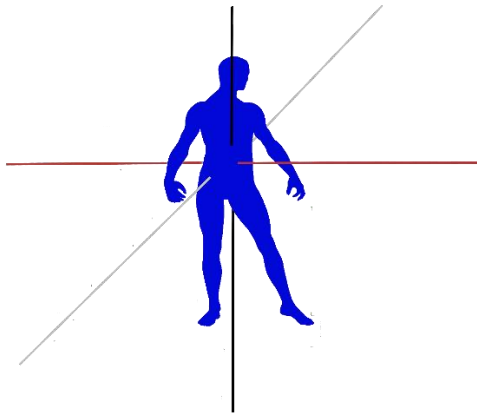
The polarity of one’s own body is reflected due to the opposing physical directions in the space (vertical, horizontal, directed; see the illustration on page 16).⁹

The endpoint of these directions describes in this connection with reference to

⁸ From the interview: Katja Nicodemus with Juliette Binoche, Die Zeit Nr. 6, 31 January 2019, pg 37

⁹ Hofer, Steffi (2017): Eyeboddy,, Contact within a Space. Sprechen Magazine 63, pg. 3

others, be it an object or a situation¹⁰. These endpoints are seen or imagined. My way of seeing decides to what extent it's possible for me to experience the respective endpoint.



ESTERA STENZEL

An actor communicates only then with a partner (or with the audience) when he concretely illustrates the Seen (or imagined). One anchors the seen or imagined picture in the space and so creates a space within a space. It stands out therefore twice in two directions: from the actor to the partner and from the actor to the created space; from the partner to the actor and from the partner to the created space. The constant checking of the Seen to the partner must be there, otherwise there is a risk that the direction from the partner to the actor's created space will fade. One can use the hand to show this direction. One can also physically not show it; one can show it still in the imagination.

Drama expert Ulrike Hass creates the stage area through seeing and showing and makes it in such a way dependent on it. Therefore she knows, like Merleau-Ponty, that the I goes to the zero point. For the director and choreographer Chetouane, the gaze represents the condition to be in a space.

LAURENT CHETOUANE

My task[...] is to make the performer aware of the gaze, to move them into awareness, of how this gaze is staged or choreographed. And how one can deal with it, so that through spatialization they can have a sense of liberty.¹¹

When a space is empty, there are no resistances. Empty spaces will therefore experience, not where expansive movements meet expected limitations, but rather where they run into uncertainty.¹²

That means therefore, that no matter if we are on, behind or in front of the stage, we must create references, in order to reach into the physical tension. We can also compare physical tension with presence in a space. In my previous article, I referred in this connection to the statement that to be present means to have the same awareness of myself and others. We anchor ourselves between seeing, gesturing and speaking in a space, and with that decide about the how of our presence.

To continue, I'd like to describe four concrete synergies, and to show their effects, if and how far we can establish contact in a space.

¹⁰ see Hofer (2018): The acting Speech, pg 14

¹¹ Chetouane, Laurent

¹² Fuchs, pg. 157

It concerns the optimal use of intrapersonal spaces, which should reflect their resistances in physical space.

1. The synergy of sight and speech

As mentioned above, the mouth is the first space into which we expand. We encounter resistances in the mouth, we experience the mouth as a space. A resonant voice has a positive effect on the muscles in the front part of the eyes and face, so that in their ability to vibrate they can constantly alternate between tension and relaxation.

Vice versa, the peripheral vision causes the sphenoid bone (the central bone in the eye socket) to vibrate.¹³ This in turn has a positive effect on our pelvis, along with our exhalation. I described the correlation between the sphenoid bone and the pelvis in the 2017 article. The sphenoid bone is also moved in conjunction with the hard palate and thus its flexibility affects the size of the oral cavity. The sphenoid bone and hard palate protect on one hand the bones of the skull and the brain, and on the other hand the cavities of the sphenoid and palate represent important resonance spaces for the voice.

FEEDBACK FROM THE PRESENCE WORKSHOP 2018

I've learnt a lot of new things about my body, especially about the connection between the eyes and sight and the rest of the body. We got to know our peripheral vision and worked a lot with it. For the first time I really became aware of my voice as well as of really using it. (Dance student of MUK)

A fixed gaze contracts the sphenoid bone in one way through the tension of the rotation muscles of the front part of the eye. Alongside this, the hard palate is affected, as is the resonance. In another way, the ligament of the eye (a belt-like fascia around the skull) is also contracted. This results in tension in the short muscles of the neck, which essentially changes the form of the Superficial Backline.¹⁴

It should not be ignored, that the orofacial muscle groups likewise influence each other. In this explanation I would like however to deliberately concentrate on the interactions between the front part of the eye or the visual pathway and separate parts of the body.

The aforementioned imbalances can also create tensions between the bones of the skull, and consequently the seams of the skull. It creates changes to the cavity within our body.

Every body has as a neutral body the largest possible cavities. These essentially have an effect on the ability to perceive and react.

Inspired by the psychologist Viktor E. Frankl¹⁵, we can imagine the following: depending on how I receive or perceive a stimulus, my cavities are available for my response.

¹³ see Hofer, *sprechen* magazine article, Issue 63 Article 2017

¹⁴ Myers *Myofascial Meridians*

¹⁵ Viktor E. Frankl in Covey, Stephen R. (2018): *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*



2. The synergy of sight and hand

The importance of the hand for the development of our brains is well known. Resulting from this is the parallel development of the eye and hand musculature. The visual pathway¹⁶ and the front part of the eye consist of many layers, which developed from the structure of the brain. The 11th cranial nerve, the nervus opticus, represents a central fibre section of our brain¹⁷. The visual process and the visual pathway influence each other reciprocally and are in their first function responsible for the coordination of brain and body¹⁸. The parallel development of hand and eye motor activity within the Motorcortex is central for the speech and voice development; however this has not been sufficiently investigated.

The somatotope illustration* shows a kind of neighbourhood in the motor cortex of eye and hand, such as eye and speech tools, which can represent a further clue to their synergetic relationships.

*Somatotope Illustration of the Body:

Swallowing-tongue-jaw-lips-face-eyelid and eyeball-eyebrow-throat-thumbs-index finger-middle finger-ring finger-hand-wrist-elbow-torso-hips-knee-ankle-toes

The neurons in the post central gyrus of the primary somatosensory cortex are each concerned with the stimulation of various parts of the body. Some regions like face, mouth, hands and feet are represented by more neurons in the cortex, therefore we are more sensitive to the stimulation of these parts¹⁹.

Hands and eyes or the visual system create experiences, which as described above, are based on tactile and visual perception.

According to Wilson,²⁰ the hand provides us with information for the dynamic process of imagination. In speaking, the imagination of the individual can be heard.

This is what makes the work in the speech education of performing artists so interesting.

¹⁶ part of the neural pathway of the visual system, from the retina to the visual cortex.

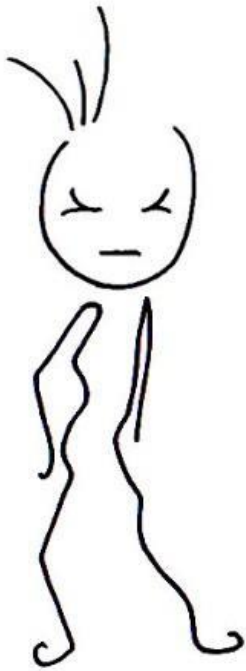
¹⁷ Trepel (1999) Neuroanatomy, Structure and Function, pg. 106

¹⁸ Hofer, sprechen Magazine Issue 59: The visual system and its influences on your own presence

¹⁹ <https://www.dasgehirn.info/handeln/motorik/kommandozentrale-fuer-bewegungen>

²⁰ see Wilson, Frank R. (2000) The Hand – How its use shapes the brain, language and human culture, pg. 273

A frequent observation in teaching is that the imagination isn't optimally available in speech, if the accomplishment of the aim in the foreground opposes the allowing in of the situation. When someone doesn't get involved in the situation, they narrow themselves, and are not able to rely on memory and imagination.



The gaze is fixed. Jaw and shoulder girdle can no longer move freely. I already described the synergy between the gaze and the jaw in the 2017 article.

The hand plays a role, so that the direction is shown in our imagination. If the imagination is blocked, the reference to others or to intentions is not recognisable. That which we initially carry out with our hand, leads, when we are concrete, to the use of the imagination. Furthermore, a contracted gaze affects the train-like movements of the fascia, tangible on the Deep Back Armline (DBA). The DBA is a series of fascia, that begin at the occiput and reach to the fingertips. They are influenced by the tension of the muscles at

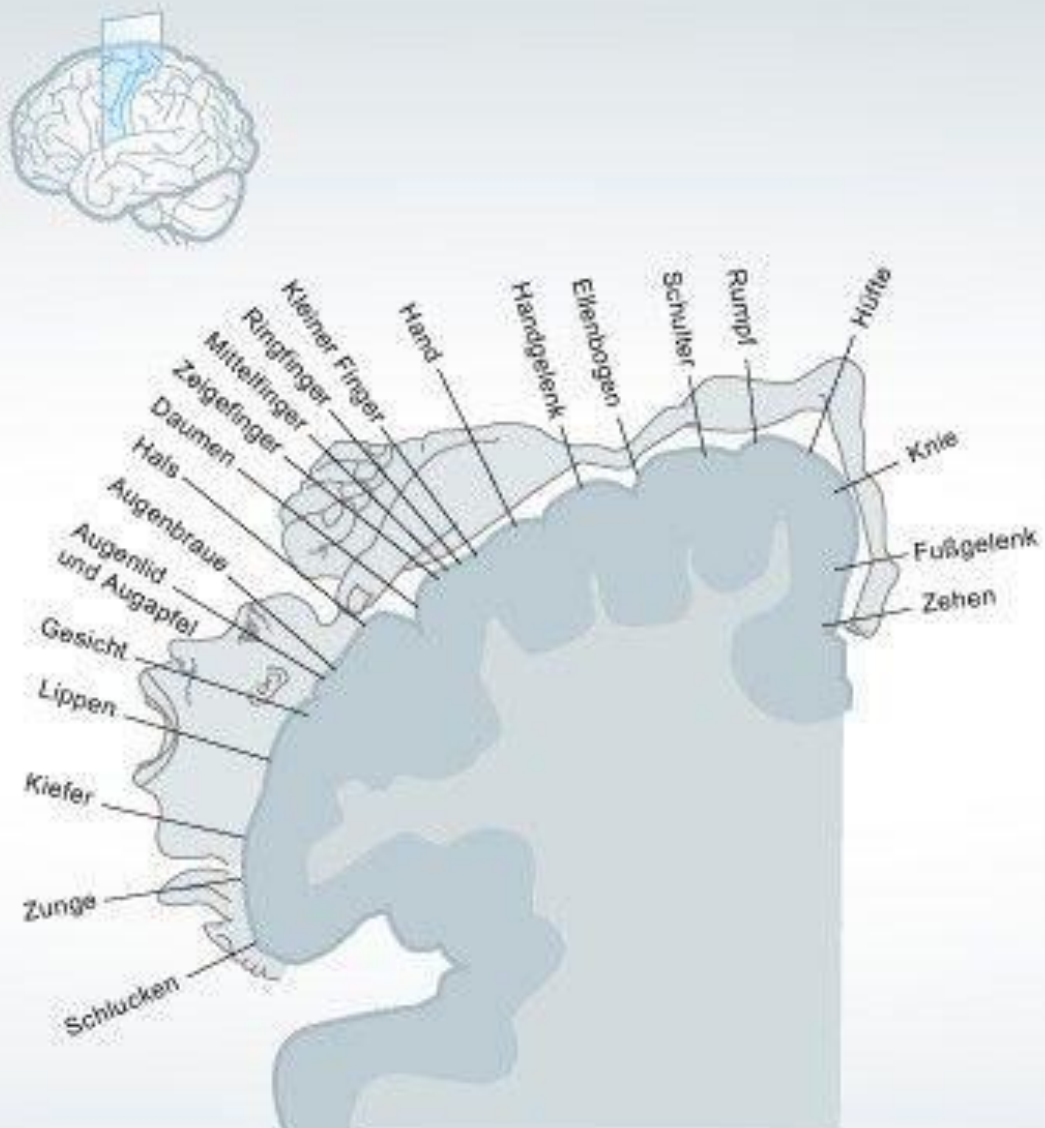
the occiput (*musculus capitis lateralis*), and correspond to the chin and eye fascia. When the DBA isn't able to move freely due to a muscular tightening in the eye or head region, this can lead to deviations in the function of speech and voice training.

The ability to get myself involved depends on my awareness and thus on the wider gaze, which this in turn makes possible. In this way, intrapersonal spaces are made available. This can be immediately verified, by the way in which we move from the fixed gaze to the wider gaze. To make a concrete reference to something, the directionality of the hand and gaze is required.

Directionality shouldn't however be misunderstood as over-focussing, or so called staring. The directed gaze arises much more from the wider gaze. Otherwise I run the risk over contracting the body, for example the nape of the neck and the breathing space (see 2017 article).

Without this directionality I stay on the other hand unconcrete, and it leads to imbalances in the interrelationship of the individual body parts. The lack of directionality is often a reason why the body contracts itself in a space. The tension of the body and of the speech reveals our willingness in the situation. On the plus side, it corresponds to the possibilities of a free-moving interrelationship. I react adequately to the situation, and am understandable in my intention. Otherwise formulated thus: an experience enabled body shows itself in its permeability and a connected speech. With the connected speech, the optimal interaction between intention, breath and resonance spaces is enabled, and the breath follows the inner and outer movement.

Somatotope Abbildung des Körpers



Die Neuronen im postzentralen Gyrus des primären somatosensorischen Cortex sprechen jeweils auf die Reizung unterschiedlicher Körperbereiche an. Manche Regionen wie Gesicht, Mund, Hände oder Füße werden im Cortex von mehr Neuronen repräsentiert, darum sind wir für Reizungen dort empfindlicher.

21

3. The synergy of arm, eye and imagination

As already summarized, the gaze provides essential requirements for the balance in the body, in that our eye coordinates the body. For example: we want to throw a ball far over a fence. We can no longer see where it will land, only imagine it. In such a way the idea organises our physical readiness.

PAUL VALERY

And finally – the attention can be used for the inner attention, which requires a strange simulation procedure. One looks inside oneself, as if it were with ones own eyes. In order not to see, the eyes attach themselves to a body, so that the idea will be obvious.²²

When we consciously work in a lesson with this idea, the orofascial musculature no longer tenses, the eye no longer pushes forward in the eye socket, and the breath can enter.

In the Eyebody Method®, the individual parts of the front part of the eye relate to our upper body (see www.eyebody.com). For professional speakers and singers, these relationship patterns can give clarity to restrictions in resonance.²³

The knowledge of these possible relationships essentially enriches the diagnostics in voice and speech training, so that information on the causes of for example a slumped body or tight shoulder girdle can be received. Thomas W. Myers

describes in his book Myofascial Meridians that there is a parallel between the muscular control of the eyeball and the humeral head.²⁴ The Eyebody® Patterns of Grunwald relate the cornea with the shoulder.²⁵

Through my experience in teaching, this interrelationship can be confirmed as well. The looseness of the front part of the eye allows the eyeball to go in the direction of the retina, the eyeball no longer pushes against the lens, and the cornea is no longer under pressure. In that moment, when I point out to the students the looseness of the eyes in the use of peripheral vision, their body widens, and their shoulders release. As a result, the peripheral gaze widens into intrapersonal spaces, which can be immediately heard. The willingness to let oneself go and to act is possible.

EUGEN HERRIGAL

“In the pulling of the bowstring, they must not exert all of their physical strength, but rather must learn to only let their two hands do the work, while their arm and shoulder muscles stay relaxed, and appear uninvolved.”²⁶

In the famous treatise “Zen in the Art of Archery”, Herrigel also points out the far-reaching abilities of our imagination. Only through imagination is the endpoint provided for a successful outcome. According

²² Valery, pg. 243

²³ (www.eyebody.com); Hofer (2015/2017) *sprechen* magazine Issue 59, 63

²⁴ Myers, Thomas W. (2010) *Anatomy Trains, Myofascial Meridians*, pg 197

²⁵ www.eyebody.com – Relationship patterns

²⁶ Herrigel, pg. 27

to Fuchs, the imagination isn't a drawing in of awareness, but rather including it.²⁷

When I therefore advise to stay with wideness while looking, this calls on the imagination and in such a way the contact to myself.

FEEDBACK FROM THE PRESENCE WORKSHOP 2018

The peripheral gaze already helps me in daily life, and also in rehearsals and on stage. It changes the ability to be here. When I work with the various methods, I feel better, safer, and I get feedback from observers that there is another kind of presence in me.

(Dance student MUK)

From where to where?

I summon the wideness with peripheral vision²⁸ and the distance from where I began. Nothing begins in now, everything has a before. For the students this in turn calls on the imagination and allows optimal breath capacity to be available. Directly in the text work it is essential to always ask oneself: What came before? At the ArtEZ in Anhem in the Netherlands in 2018, I experienced how the Basics teacher invited the first year acting students to walk around the room with open arms, to anchor themselves. He asked the students: Where are you coming from and where do you want to go? The space will only be created, when we think of the 'before' and the 'after.' To reinforce the feeling of before-now-after, he let the students walk with open arms, which simultaneously called on the wider gaze.

Wideness and distance are essential requirements, in order to make a direct grasp possible by means of the hand and the articulation.

4. The synergy of sight, hand and fingertips

A further Pattern in the Eyebody Method® exists between the hand/forearm and the crossover and outer sheath of the optic nerve. In this context, it's interesting to deal with the reflections of the neurophysiologist Charles Sherrington, who speculated that the skin at the tip of the thumb and index finger is felt by the brain to be as sensitive as a part of the retina, the macula. Briefly pressing together the thumb and index finger allows these possible interrelationships to be guessed. The macula is the area of the retina responsible for clear sight.

What does that mean for us in Speech education?

The imagination produces references and endpoints in a space. Whether we are pointing with the index finger or only imagining it, the effect is the same. If the imagined pointing is missing, or the actual pointing of the hands, the directions and references are also missing, as well as the intention in speaking.

Conclusion

When we speak we create spaces. The resonant spaces in ourselves correspond with the external spaces around us. We come into contact with others, share our awareness and recall what we mean through our imagination.

²⁷ Fuchs, pg. 173

²⁸ Hofer (2015) sprechen magazine Issue 59, pg 15

All of these processes are led consciously or subconsciously by our gaze and our hands, which give our speech direction.

I have portrayed in the previous chapters how exactly the gaze has an effect on the availability in speaking. The central issue of the coming research phase is to empirically investigate the relationships between the gaze, the imagination and the vocal apparatus. I am currently widening my network, in order to advance to a transdisciplinary, trial based research approach.

Bibliography

FRANKL, Victor E. in Covey, Stephen R. (2018): *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Offenbach: Franklin Covey Company/GABAL.

FUCHS, Thomas (1999) *Leib, Raum, Person. Entwurf einer phänomenologischen Anthropologie*, Stuttgart: Klett Cotta Verlag.

GRUNWALD, Peter (2007) *Eyebody, Die Integration von Auge, Gehirn und Körper oder die Kunst, ohne Brille zu leben*. Neuseeland, Condevis Verlag.

HASS, Ulrike (2007): *Das Drama des Sehens, Auge, Blick und Bühnenform*, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

HERRIGAL, Eugen (2011): *ZEN in the Art of Archery*, München, O.W. Barth Verlag.

HOFER, Steffi (2015): *Das Sehsystem und seine Einflüsse auf die eigene Präsenz. Von der Integration des Sehsystems in die sprecherzieherische Arbeit*. In *Sprechen Heft 59*, S. 42–57.

HOFER, Steffi (2017): *Eyebody – Kontakt im Raum und wie wir durch unseren Blick wieder in die körperliche Ausbreitung finden*. In *Sprechen Heft 63*, S. 6–14.

HOFER, Steffy (2018): *Das handelnde Sprechen*, Bochum/Freiburg: projectverlag.

KLUGE, Friedrich (2011): *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter.

MÜLLER-SCHÖLL, Nicolaus; OTTO, Leonie (2016): *Unterm Blick des Fremden, Theaterarbeit nach Laurent Chetouane*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

MYERS, Thomas W. (2010): *Anatomy Trains, Myofasciale Leitbahnen*, München: Elsevier Urban & Fischer.

NICODEMUS, Katja (2019), *Ich bin radikaler denn je, Die Schauspielerin Juliette Binoche ist Jurypräsidentin der kommenden Berlinale*. In: *Die Zeit*, 31. Januar 2019, S. 37.

PLATON, *Gesammelte Werke*, 36 Titel in einem Buch – vollständige deutsche Ausgabe, E-Book Version, Position 37.

TREPEL, Martin (1999): *Neuroanatomie, Struktur und Funktion*, München u. a.: Urban Fischer Verlag.

VALERY, Paul (2011) *Ich grase meine Gehirnwiese ab*, Paul Valery und seine verborgenen Cahiers, München: Die andere Bibliothek im Eichborn Verlag, S. 233.

WILSON, Frank R. (2000): *Die Hand – Geniestreich der Evolution, ihr Einfluss auf Gehirn, Sprache und Kultur des Menschen*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

About the author

Steffy Hofer is a graduate in speech sciences and phonetic. She is currently working as a professor in the Department of Drama and Musical Theatre at MUK (Music and Arts University of the City of Vienna) and is a research associate at the Institute for Science and Research at MUK on the subject of the relationship between seeing and speaking, with the main emphasis on the research of contact within a space.

Homepage: www.steffihofer.at