STEFFY HOFER

# Contact in Space
# The process of seeing as an important element in speech training

## The Contact

I have been interested in the interconnectedness between the process of seeing, respiration and the associated willingness to engage in contact since 2013, when I first learned about Peter Grunwald's Eyebody® method. Over the years, I realised in the course of practising my profession that contact impacts on a healthy person's breathing capacity. However, at what point does CONTACT begin, and how does optimum CONTACT affect our speech and presence?

The word contact is based on the Latin contactus/contingere, and means touch, grasp[1]. Contact therefore describes something active, physical, material that moves and changes. At the same time, contact also means ability to resonate.[2] In other words, contact has a significant effect on our breathing and resonances, and accordingly on how our counterpart behaves in the space we occupy. In the previous research phase, I focused on the efficiency of the CONTACT that has occurred from a *speech training* perspective, which prompted me to specialise in working with vision.

> *Seeing, not seeing; gazing, not gazing; looking, not looking; perceiving, capturing, extending lines and the clearly defined; leaving traces – SELF[3].*

Verbal communication is about that which lasts and that which changes. I therefore like to employ the metaphor of TRACES. I refer to the material that alters the space and the other as traces. It becomes visible through the people who are acting, in their physical tension and breathing. We leave traces when we have embedded ourselves in a space, have negotiated something, have reached the other.

---

1 Kluge (2011). *An Etymological Dictionary*, 526.
2 Rosa, H. (2016). *Resonance*, 83.
3 Hofer, St. (2019). *sprechen* magazine, vol. 67, 13.

## The Space

The architect Erwin Heerich says that space is within space, which is infinite, referring to the spaces that surround us as well as the interior spaces of buildings. At the same time, this statement also applies to our intrapersonal spaces. Our intrapersonal spaces affect the spaces that surround us and vice versa.

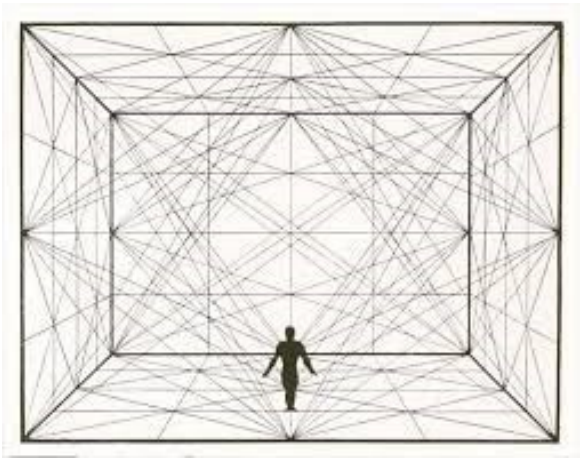

**Fig. 1** Cuboid space with invisible lines[4]

In the acting world, the physical space is usually defined as the stage space. The stage space shown here as a cubic space with a human body in the centre was designed 100 years ago in the heyday of the Bauhaus movement by the painter and stage designer Oskar Schlemmer. According to Schlemmer, the geometrical relationships in the outer space equate the geometrical relationships inside the human body. Schlemmer believed that clashes between the inner and the outer spaces are counterbalanced by the body's movements in the space.

The theatre director and film-maker Peter Brook, on the other hand, writes that the stage is a reflection of life; however, this life could not be lived through for a single moment if there was no work system based on the observation of certain values and the making of value judgements.[5]

For the drama and theatre studies expert Ulrike Hass, the stage space is created by SEEING and PERFORMING[6] which, conversely, means that the creation of the

4 Schlemmer, O., Moholy-Nagy, L., Molnár F. (1925). *Die Bühne am Bauhaus*, 13.
5 Brook, P. (2016), *The Empty Space*. 129.
6 Hass, U. (2005), *Das Drama des Sehens*. 17.

space depends on the processes of seeing and performing. Like the philosopher

Merleau-Ponty, she considers the SELF to be point zero.[7]

I understand point zero to be our brain and our spine, which forms the connection between brain and body via the spinal cord. This is where the impulse is generated. The impulse is motivated by the moment that triggers the action.[8] My comments are based on Brook's and Hass's definitions of space inasmuch as the stage space adapts social spaces where the impulse marks the starting point of an action.

Examining space in speech training is important, as the space and our intrapersonal resonance spaces are always in reciprocal interaction. The seeing process grasps the space and organises the body accordingly. Decisive in this respect is the way we see. Seeing shapes **my intrapersonal spaces. My intrapersonal spaces reflect my surroundings.**[9]

## The Sixth Sense – Body Awareness

"Everyone has it; hardly anyone knows it."[10]

The sixth sense was discovered at the beginning of the 20th century by the Scottish neurologist and Nobel Prize laureate Charles Sherrington. He identified the receptors that mediate self-perception, the so-called proprioceptors. Several senses contribute to our perception of our body and its posture: "Our sense of touch and sense of balance, but above all the mechanosensory neurons in the muscles, tendons and joints. These tiny monitoring stations constantly inform our brain about the position, tension and movement of our body parts. […] Since its discovery, the sense of body awareness this gives us has been called proprioception."[11]

The sixth sense is activated by our intentions and supported by our brain. The brain stores memories in the form of sensory information. These memories also reference our perception in the space.

In consequence, our intention and how consciously and clearly we arrive at it is based on our sensory information. Our specific

7 Merleau Ponty, M. (1967). *Eye and Mind*, 31.
8 Hofer, St. (2018). *Das handelnde Sprechen*, 14.
9 Hofer, St. (2017). *sprechen* magazine vol. 63, 6
10 Mechsner, F. & Smetacek, V. (2015). *Der sechste Sinn*. Sentker, A. (ed.). *Die Welt im Kopf*. 142.
11 Mechsner, F. & Smetacek, V. (2015). *Der sechste Sinn*. Sentker, A. (ed.). *Die Welt im Kopf*. 143.

intentions motivate our body to provide the best-possible support by adapting our breathing volume or physical tension, for example.

## The Vision

Besides the other senses, contact is usually initiated by seeing. This happens either through the establishment of direct visual contact in the space or thanks to our power of imagination. For example, we expect that a person is going to enter the space: imagining this person is part of our perception and therefore part of our mental process.[12] We remember something we have seen previously. Our imagination then triggers an immediate physical change: we either occupy more or less space.

**The clearer an intention, in our case speech, the more physical support follows.**

> "The immediate physical form of consciously engaging with a person, an animal or also something inanimate, for example a landscape, is the establishment of visual contact or making them the object of our *visual focus*. From antiquity until the Renaissance, it was mostly assumed that the connections between the eyes of the seeing person and everything else in the world and particularly, of course, the eyes of other people, were formed by hidden, invisible rays that could also produce touching or moving resonance effects […]"[13]

The first and foremost function of the process of seeing is the coordination of body and mind. Seeing therefore serves spatial orientation and physical adaptation. Being able to see clearly is only the process of seeing's secondary function.[14] These days, the process of seeing has unfortunately been reduced to merely this ability, and this particularly in the western world.

In relation to the spoken word, the initial function of the process of seeing is one of the conditions for contact. The seen links past experiences and motivates our power of imagination. Our imagination as such is always a combination of past experiences that are stored together with the just perceived. Perception is always a result, just like our voice. It is the result of processed information. The power of imagination, on the other hand, refers to the reactivation of perception representations.[15] Perception and the power of imagination work hand in hand in order to engage with something, to act intentionally and to thereby become audible in the form of speech. Perceiving is something active and is revealed,

---

12 Hofer, St. (2019). *sprechen* magazine, vol. 67, 14.
13 Rosa, H. (2016). *Resonance*, 115.
14 Grunwald, P. (2007). *Eyebody*, 44.
15 Farah, M.J. in Kaplan, S. (1998). *Neurophysiologische Korrelate malerischer Begabung*, 83.

for example, in the actions of the hands, in the way we see and also in our speech.[16]

Vision interferes with the space. It therefore describes us. The other reads us.

Vision extends or shortens, expands or constricts us in a space. Vision

serves our orientation and purposeful action.

An important commonality vision shares with the elemental processes of breathing, voice and speech is therefore purposefulness. However, purposeful visual contact does not mean the over focused visual contact that only triggers constrictions in our body but rather the purposefulness of peripheral vision. This visual focus indicates our openness.

## Methodology

I recognised the first interconnections between the process of seeing, our respiratory resources and the ability to engage in contact through my work with Peter Grunwald[17], who developed the Eyebody Method®[18] over the past thirty years. Grunwald established relationship patterns between the line of vision and the whole body[19]. Interesting from a speech training perspective here are the relationships between the front of the eye, i.e. the visible part of the eye, and the upper body.[20] Even though these relationship patterns have not yet been empirically confirmed, I can state that I have been able to successfully apply Grunwald's method in my training. The techniques of various well-known body psychotherapists such as Moshe Feldenkrais, Frederick Matthias Alexander, Alon Talmi, Dub Leigh, Ida Rolf and others suggest this, particularly since they show clear parallels to Grunwald's system. However, directors such as Robert Wilson as well as the dancer, choreographer and professor for movement Martin Gruber also appear to employ congruent approaches. For example, learning the Talmi Method® from Martin Gruber helped me to expand my employment of the Eyebody Method®.

In speech training, I have worked with the consciousness of peripheral vision, the eye movements and the so-called line-seeing since 2014 and have thereby optimised the work with the power of imagination [21], which is one element of my speech training work. Once I had understood that seeing clearly is merely the secondary function of our seeing process, I became interested in the Eyebody

16 Fuchs, Th. (1999). *Leib, Raum, Person*, 169.
17 Hofer, St. (2015). *sprechen* magazine vol. 59, 42
18 Hofer, St. (2015). *sprechen* magazine vol. 59, 49.
19 Grunwald, P. (2007). *Eyebody*®, cover image
20 Grunwald, P. (2007). *Eyebody*®, cover image
21 Hofer, St. (2015). *sprechen* magazine, vol. 59, 42.

Method®. In order to investigate the observations I had made in the course of my practical work further, I have carried out various research activities over the past few years. What students and course participants have told me of their experiences confirms the apparent interconnections.

## Effects of working with the eyes on the functions of the vocal tract

I would like to illustrate to what extent working with vision influences the elemental processes of breathing, phonating and articulating with the help of the following table.

| Working on VISION / speech training methods | Effects |
|---|---|
| Visual power of imagination | • Cerebral blood flow[22]<br>• Self-awareness<br>• Specific intentions |
| Peripheral vision | • Increased respiratory resources<br>• Spine position adaptation<br>• Jaw relaxation<br>• Tongue relaxation<br>• Hard palate expands<br>• Relaxed pectoral girdle and ribcage<br>• Relaxation of vagus nerve (CN X)<br>• Self-awareness |
| Line-seeing | • Sphenoid bone and pelvis flexibility<br>• Relaxation of vagus nerve (CN X)<br>• Spine position adaptation<br>• Neck relaxation<br>• Back relaxation<br>• Clearer decisions<br>• Deep breathing |
| Various eye movements | • Relaxation of vagus nerve (CN X)<br>• Increased innervation of soft palate and larynx<br>• Increased soft palate tonus<br>• Deep breathing<br>• Relaxed pectoral girdle and ribcage<br>• Tongue relaxation |

Please refer to my articles in this field published in the magazine for more detailed descriptions of the influences mentioned here.

22 Kaplan, S. (1998). *Neurophysiologische Korrelate malerischer Begabung*, 82.

## Expansion in space

Breathing, voice and speech contribute to our presence in space and indicate our awareness in the respective moment. Presence results from our bodily tension, body posture, breathing and therefore the resonance spaces.

- The **breathing process** is an involuntary process; it is controlled by the respiratory centre, which reacts to a
    1. lack of oxygen,
    2. pressure drop compensation,
    3. getting ready to act and
    4. the intention to engage in contact.
- **Phonation** follows next, achieved through oscillation of the air expelled. The intensity of the emanating sound waves and the frequency richness depend, for example, on the speaker's intentions, their awareness in the space and the objective of their speech.

- The same applies more or less to **articulation**. Articulation accordingly follows the intentions behind the speech, and the self-awareness, as well as the own objectives.[23]

All three processes result in a kind of extension of the speaker into the space, and this along a vertical, a horizontal and a pointed axis.

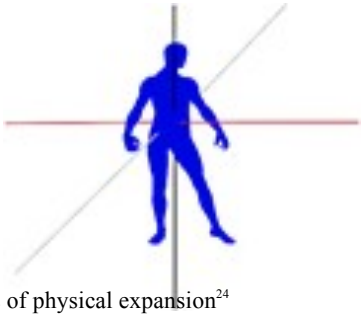

**Fig. 2** Three axes of physical expansion[24]

All three processes, respiration, phonation and articulation, depend on our awareness. This leads to self-awareness. Self-awareness facilitates presence, but does not automatically include it, as presence not only needs a communicative starting point in the space, the SELF, but also the OTHER.

---

23 I am initially only referring to native speakers

24 Steffy Hofer

For me, presence begins with the awareness of both sides: the tangible part of engaging in contact begins with awareness of the SELF and awareness of the OTHER. The starting point here is the SELF, and not the partner. The awareness is indicated by the process of seeing.

## The starting and the end point

Every sensible entity, and therefore also the spoken entity, needs a starting and an end point.[25] In the 18th century, the philosopher Hegel wrote about the phenomenology of the spirit, for example.

The psychiatrist and philosopher Thomas Fuchs revisits this in his dissertation *Leib, Raum, Person*, referring to the starting and the end points as poles.

"Each pole is what it is not without the other, and both are mediated by physical directions."[26]

The directions form a sort of line between the starting and the end point..

Employing this perspective, several lines could also cross the space during communication, depending on the number of the individual intentional communicative actions.

## The distance to things

Distancing ourselves from things makes us act more purposefully. Why? This distance does not mean the mental distance to things but only the spatial distance that makes it possible for us to recall a wider range of memories and mental images. We are making our selection from the larger pool of our memories. The distance between myself and others begins with the awareness of my back, my spine and the back of my head. It is easily possible to regulate this distance if I am directly in the wide field of vision. The consequences are, for example: the sphenoid bone swings, the front of the eye glides backwards towards the macula in the eye socket, the ribcage expands, the jaw relaxes etc. The spine adapts its position to make it easier for the spinal cord to communicate the information to the body.

A former drama student once said to me, after I had asked him during our training to trust his back more:

---

25 Hegel, G.W.F. (2006). *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 88.
26 Fuchs, Th. (1999). *Leib, Raum, Person*, 120.

"It is as if I were holding the world in front of me in my hands whereas, if I am leaning forwards, I am dragging the world along behind me with a huge effort." (Music and Arts University of the City of Vienna graduate, 2017)

## The Back

In order to develop their awareness, I asked the participants at the start of my workshop entitled *Zurück zu den Wurzeln, Elementarprozesse in Stimmbildung und Sprecherziehung* ("Back to the roots, elemental processes in phonation and speech training") at the 2019 DGSS conference in Regensburg to walk through the room backwards. This approach is standard in my training, as each participant initially develops an awareness of their own back and therefore of themselves. The limbs and pelvis position adapt, thereby activating the sixth sense, the vestibular system and the depth perception. The field of vision automatically expands. In consequence, I am more aware of myself in relation to the space. I straighten up, and the wide field of vision facilitates larger breathing spaces. The body memory stores this process, which makes it possible to transfer it to walking forwards as an automated process.

With the back, I mean, as already mentioned, the spine. Taking it as the starting point and integrating it more consciously into the way we walk or stand permits our body functions to work more naturally again. This is shown, for example, by the expansion of the ribcage; the abdomen becomes soft and allows the diaphragm to work; it is no longer possible to fall into a hollow back position. I am in a wide field of vision, as the eyes can relax and fall backwards into the eye sockets and are not overtaxed or over focusing in any way. This also has an effect on the jaw tension and the tongue tension. The face returns to its natural expression. The circular muscles around the eyes and the mouth no longer tense up, particularly due to the conscious prevention of over focusing, i.e. the front part of the eye being pushed forward. As the muscles in the front part of the eye also influence the neck muscles, these also relax.

Essentially, this means:

- The back helps me to gain a greater distance to things.
- From this distance, I decide more personally and purposefully.

The distance results from my awareness at the back and the peripheral vision.

Being at the back means living point zero. Point zero localised the place where the impulse is formed. This is communicated via the spine, the spinal cord. The consequence of this is that I also strengthen my personality as I am more collected.

## Relationship with or the Correlations INSIDE and AROUND Us

In his lectures at the University of Vienna in the 19th century, the psychologist Franz Brentano already referred to the circumstance *that people are always in relation to something*.[27] Many psychology, sociology and philosophy colleagues have since confirmed this fact. For example, a few years ago, biopsychologists found in the course of a study that people already act purposefully in the womb.[28]

What can disrupt these relations? Our own blocked correlations inside our body. They prevent us from engaging in a relationship with the outside. This is the starting point on which the diagnostics and training within the scope of speech training are based. Relationships between one point and another also occur outside our whole body. The fascias, for example, work somewhat like pulleys; they also establish relations[29] and move from one point to another. We can therefore also talk about our bones' correlation partners. For example, the sphenoid bone and the pelvis as well as the pelvis and the jaw are in direct correlation. Many of these relations are influenced by our vision, as parts of the line of vision relate to other parts of the body.

## Speech Acts

The verbal communication begins with the engaging in a relationship, in contact and the speaker's intentions. We are drawing a mental picture of an imaginary red thread that runs *all the way to* the counterpart as a result of the speaker's impulse. From starting point to end point. This thread, as I call it, is also mentioned by John L. Austin and John R. Searle[30] in their speech act theory as the so-called elocutionary act. An elocutionary act is the speaker expressing their intention in the form of a question, request, demand or similar. The effect of a pleasant-sounding voice, clear articulation and a structured speech or lecture depends on the end point of the process. The end point in the space is visualised in the imagination. It emerges from the content. This happens automatically when I am thinking clearly. This means that I am aware of myself. The causes for this are diverse.

However, parts of the content are often lost through the fact that no specific decision for an end point was made in the actual space. The content is

---

27 Hofer, St. (2018). *Das handelnde Sprechen*, 14.
28 Spät, P. (2012). *Der Mensch lebt nicht vom Hirn allein*, 19.
29 Myers Th. W. (2010). *Myofascial Meridians*, 5.
30 Krämer, S. (2001). *Sprache, Sprechakt, Kommunikation, Sprachtheoretische Positionen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 136.

weakened by a lack of such starting and end points. I cannot use all of my resources fully.

In speech science, we assume that all speech equals an action. According to Hannah Arendt, the precondition for speaking and acting is a plurality of human beings. At least two people who can represent the starting and the end point are therefore always required.

Speech is action, and action is a new beginning[31]. Every new beginning therefore needs a starting point. As Merleau-Ponty wrote, the SELF represents point zero. It can only be reflected on the conscious level.

So how do I reach this awareness? Through peripheral vision and engaging in contact with my back. This is where my intrapersonal spaces expand, my respiratory resources, and thereby also improve the conditions for voice and speech training.

## Conclusion

The aim of my research is to illustrate that seeing does not just establish a relationship with the outside space but also shapes and alters the space within us. As described, I assume that the way in which we see organises the respiratory and resonance spaces in our body.

The empirical study of these interconnections calls for transdisciplinary projects; I would also like to use this opportunity to call for their realisation.

## Further reading

Brook, P. (2016). *The Empty Space*. Berlin, Alexander Verlag

Fuchs, Th. (1999). *Leib, Raum, Person. Entwurf einer phänomenologischen Anthropologie*. Stuttgart, Klett Cotta Verlag

Grunwald, P. (2007). *Eyebody. The Art of Integrating Eye, Brain and Body - Let go of glasses forever*. New Zealand: Condevis

Han, B.Ch. (2013). *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*. Berlin: Matthes und Seitz

Hass, U. (2005). *Das Drama des Sehens, Auge, Blick und Bühnenform*. Munich: Wilhelm Finck Verlag

Hegel, G.W.F. (2006). *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag

Hofer, St. (2015). "*Das Sehsystem und seine Einflüsse auf die eigene Präsenz*." *sprechen* magazine, vol. 59, Heidelberg, 42-47.

Hofer, St. (2017). "*Eyebody - Kontakt im Raum und wie wir durch unseren Blick wieder in die körperliche Ausbreitung finden*." *sprechen* magazine vol. 63, Heidelberg, 6-14.

---

[31] Han, B. Ch. (2013) *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, 45.

Hofer, St. (2018). *Das handelnde Sprechen*, 14. Bochum: projekt Verlag, ext. edition.
Hofer, St. (2019). "*Kontakt im Raum II. Wie wir durch unseren Blick, unsere Hände und unser Sprechen Räume kreieren können*." *sprechen* magazine vol. 67, Heidelberg, 13-23
Kaplan, S. (1998). *Neurophysiologische Korrelate malerischer Begabung*, 83. Vienna/New York: Einhorn Presse Verlag
Kastner J. P. (1991). *Erwin Heerich*. Cologne: Walther König Verlag
Kluge, F. (2011). *An Etymological Dictionary of the German Language*. Berlin/ Boston: de Gruyter Verlag
Krämer, S. (2001). *Sprache, Sprechakt, Kommunikation. Sprachtheoretische Positionen des 20. Jahrhunderts.* Frankfurt (am Main): Suhrkamp Verlag
Mechsner, F. & Smetacek, V. (2015). *Der sechste Sinn*. Sentker, A. (ed.). *Unser geheimnisvolles Ich*. vol. 1, Berlin/Heidelberg Springer Spektrum Verlag
Merleau Ponty, M. (1967). *Eye and Mind. Philosophical Essays.* Reinbek near Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag
Myers Th. W. (2010). *Anatomy Trains. Myofascial Meridians for Manual Therapists and Movement Professionals*. Munich: Urban und Fischer Verlag 2020
Rosa, H. (2016). *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag 2019
Schlemmer, O., Nagy, L.-M. & Molnar, F. (1925). *Die Bühne am Bauhaus*. vol. 4. Berlin: Albert Langen Verlag Munich
Spät, P. (2012). *Der Mensch lebt nicht vom Hirn allein. Wie der Geist in den Körper kommt.*