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## The ambiance of the body

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**Abstract.** *As part of my research, I am investigating the relationship between sensed body-space and conditions in the immediate environment. Situated between art and science and between Eastern movement practices and Western theory, the sensed body-space facilitates communication between preverbal consciousness and that which can be linguistically apprehended. I am thus moving among various fields whose poles, equally considered, determine the methods of investigation and presentation. The goal is to develop access points to a holistic understanding of the body's knowledge so that this knowledge can be applied relative to events in the surrounding environment.*

**Keywords:** *body-space, movement, preverbality, 'totality' of experience*

### **Indeterminacy between artistic and scientific research**

#### *Inbetween art and science*

As part of my doctoral dissertation at Muthesius University in Kiel, Germany, I am exploring the *ambiance of the body* in relation to the surrounding atmosphere. To do this, I am examining disparate processes that span the field between artistic and scientific research. I am currently laying the foundation for this *area of research* in terms of collecting information, identifying methodologies and presenting results. My goal is to make use of various research methods, combining them in such a way that they complement each other meaningfully and expand the range of outcomes. I am investigating three different areas concurrently:

- A. Artistic approaches – which will be parsed for their potential to generate understanding (something that is traditionally not required when creating art).
- B. The development of *artistic* and/or practice-oriented methods, which will be systematically structured and goal-oriented.
- C. The theoretical perspective, to juxtapose the experimental process with research findings from the natural sciences and the humanities.

How these three areas will ultimately interact in practice remains to be seen. This text, the presentation formats and the ongoing work in the *field* between art and science will constitute different stages of that *interaction*.

#### *Experience – between preverbality and denotation*

I would like to refer to a quote by Hans Blumenberg, which appears at the beginning of his book *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit (Theory of Nonconceptuality)*:

‘The concept is considered a product of reason, if not its triumph, and indeed it is. Yet that does not admit the reverse, i.e. reason is only present when reality, life or

being – however one wants to describe totality – has been successfully reduced to a concept or the intention to do so is present.’ This quote touches on various aspects of my investigation and the fundamental problem underlying my efforts. I am working at one of the interfaces between *preverbality* and *denotation*. Experience can be clear, distinct and extremely precise without being describable. Every description robs experience of some of its clarity and even deforms it. At the same time, description can and should suggest experience and point to its *holistic nature*. The *expansion of form* that transcends conceptual approaches, disentangles, at best, the experience of ‘totality’<sup>1</sup>.

### *All knowledge is embodied – being human means being corporal*

In the following I discuss the approaches used in the three *areas of investigation* described above:

Area A. The area of artistic creation is used to examine the degree to which creative processes can contribute to research and in which form. The artistic process is seen here as a *laboratory* for freely generating ideas, one that can be used for working with highly unstructured formats. It allows for spontaneous and associative action using every type of artistic means, such as drawing and movement, in order to sketch out content and invent forms of exchange. The resulting *non-foreseeable* should be used, on the one hand, to develop research methods and, on the other, to expand on traditional approaches by an experience of its sensual (and vital) qualities.

Area B. Artistic or practice-oriented methods might be either experimental or discipline-based and shall investigate individual questions within the overall setting. The focus on the *body-space* (including introspection) and ‘movement as method’ are key components in my efforts to develop holistic approaches and procedures.

The most important part of my educational training has been the learning of an Asian movement practice, a non-traditional practice from Indonesia. This practice is not so much about movement per se, but about perceiving movement and impulses to move in the body, and following them by using body movements, either visible or invisible. The attention is directed toward the *body-space*<sup>2</sup> and, at the same time, to the surrounding space. That means, it encompasses the individual’s body-space in its entirety and, from *here-there*, the immediate environment. I express this as ‘*here-there*’ since the *body-space* remains the point of reference and point of departure for perceiving but – because the attention is not focused on something specific, yet instead expands/senses from the spatiality of the body into the surrounding environment – there is no longer a clear *here*, neither a *there*. One finds oneself embodied in the situation and adopts neither an observing nor a descriptive perspective. On the contrary, one remains a perceiving presence. One follows the ‘spatially tangible *dynamic and movement*’<sup>3</sup> of impulses in the *body-space*. Then, with each movement, as small as it may be – every tilt of the head, a few steps through the room, etc. – the state of the organism moves and changes, as does the

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1. *Totality as used in this paper is linked closely to Blumenberg’s quote.*

2. *I employ the term body-space (Körperraum) for the space that we perceive when we turn our attention inwards.*

3. *“When we isolate the senses from the outside world and temporarily let our visible body descend into darkness, then another completely different type of spatiality replaces it: the sphere of corporeal sensation, impulses and conditions ... All of this is neither visible or tangible, but it can be sensed spatially.”(Fuchs, 2000: 89)*

(perceived) atmosphere. The following, pursuing or yielding gradually brings into consciousness rhythms in the behavioural and perceptual processes that relate tangibly within the *body-space* to the environment. These are *logical processes* that can be experienced and understood – yet *understood* (initially?) beyond the conceptual realm. I believe this is a *preverbal understanding* that is communicated first and foremost *atmospherically*. This perception is *more comprehensive* but cannot be (easily) categorised and understood in terms of the linguistically oriented, analytical consciousness. (Billeter, 2015; Sheets-Johnstone, 1990)

Area C. Relationship to theory – especially to those from perceptual psychology and the neurosciences, and with approaches from philosophy and the social sciences that focus on the *body* and '*Leib*' (as discussed below).

Science's increasing interest in the *body* corresponds to a gradual movement from the *external* toward the *internal*, from the observed and observable, the measurable and quantifiable toward the sensed and perceived, the individual, *invisible* and 'qualitative'. I would like to sketch out four different perspectives that examine the *sensed body* and the relationship between body, consciousness and knowledge in interdisciplinary research. I refer to them as elementary reference points.

1. In Germany, '*Leib*' has become a standard term, having been systematically developed by Hermann Schmitz since the 1960s within his system of New Phenomenology. It was Schmitz who used the method of introspection to introduce terms such as '*Leib*' and '*Atmosphäre*' (*atmosphere*) into the philosophical discourse. Very briefly, *Leib* describes 'that which one *senses* of oneself, *Körper*, in contrast [is] ... that which one *sees* or *feels* of oneself.' (Soentgen, 1998: 16) *Leib* has also been taken up by different branches of the natural sciences and the humanities (i.e. Gugutzer, 2012; Fuchs, 2008; Rittelmeyer, 2002).
2. Findings from neuroscience *prove* the elementary relationship between the body, the individual state of being and the environment. 'Feelings include ... a sensing of the body's entire visceral and musculoskeletal condition, while the latter changes under the influence of certain perceptions.' (Fuchs, 2008: 139) Environmental perception arises from learned patterns of perception and interpretation, which ensue from the sensomotoric relationship to the environment. The 'brain as a relational organ' develops only within this interdependency. (Hüther, 2006: 83 ff.) Everything that *occurs* in terms of phenomena, impulses, sensations, thoughts, etc., takes place in and results from the corporeal, dynamic relationship to the environment. 'Consciousness ... is not in the "body", but is *embodied*.' (Fuchs, 2008)
3. Psychologist and philosopher Eugene Gendlin has developed methods in which he specifically works with attentively sensing the *indefinite* in the *inner-body*. One of his methods, *Focusing*, can be used to solve (personal) problems. 'It awakens a new type of inner awareness of that which one initially only felt as being unclear. This lack of clarity then becomes the object of one's focus' (Gendlin, 1981). His practice of *Thinking at the Edge* can be seen as a further development of *Focusing*, in that it uses the *body's knowledge* in order to 'think where words are still lacking' (Deloch, 2010). He developed this method in the 1990s together with students at the University of Chicago 'in order to support the development of independent research efforts'. (Deloch, 2010)
4. In terms of the *Eastern* perspective, I would like to quote the Sinologist Jean-François Billeter, who translates texts written by the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi

and interprets them from the perspective of Western experience. Zhuangzi is particularly interested in the 'forms of our activity' between 'conscious and unconscious action' (Billeter, 2015) which, embodied between conscious and implicit knowledge, changes, whence Billeter interprets the *body* anew: "Je donne au mot *corps* une acception nouvelle. J'appelle *corps* toute l'activité non consciente qui porte mon activité consciente." Further: "Ce que nous appelons 'conscience' est *cette part de notre activité qui se perçoit elle-même.*" (Billeter, 2014 : 12 f.)

### *Indefinite clarity*

Nothingness, heaviness and dullness even, sleepiness, doing nothing, lying, falling, slowly, everything happening very slowly, listening, dropping, diving down, a small movement, something stirs, pursuing that, a word, a thought, turning, the head lifts slightly, falls again, lifts, remains fixed in midair, the movement continues, down the neck and spine, the abdomen rises just a bit from the floor, turns slightly, from here the arm extends, the body bends and comes to rest on its side, contracts, stretches, a change, sudden alertness, clearly sensing the floor, sitting up, slowly, seeing the room, bending toward the floor, straightening again and beginning with this impulse the body spins upward high onto the feet, revolves around its own axis into the air, the arms follow, swing around the abdomen, the head falls and rises, the spinning diminishes and while standing there is suddenly clarity of being, clear vision, relief, an intake of breath, presence within the space, felt density –

### *Attentiveness to the atmospheric*

In our culture, we are not used to paying attention to the *atmospheric*. In Asian cultures, it seems this has traditionally not been the case. The spatially and corporally *atmospheric* is part of written and everyday culture there (Magnis-Suseno, 1981; Linck, 2011; Yamaguchi, 2011). Nevertheless, in our culture we too move in the *invisible atmospheric* as a matter of course (*automatically*) and allow ourselves to be led by our – mostly unconscious – perceptions (Hüther, 2006; Damasio, 2004).

Because of our bodies, we are present in situations, and it is in or with the body that we react and *respond* to the corresponding conditions. Atmosphere is communicated through the (unconsciously) experienced *body-space* as "the resonance felt in one's *Leib* ... of interpersonal perception" (Fuchs, 2008: 200). The *ambiance of the body* as *inter-space* between the atmospheric inner-space and the surrounding atmosphere provides access to practice sensitivity for the *interaction* of preconscious and conscious emanations and processes.

### *Theory arises from practice*

Blumenberg speaks of 'reality, life or being – whatever one wants to call totality'. Did 'totality' exist beforehand – before the translation into conceptual terms? The 'totality' of experience that cannot be 'turned into a concept'? In this mode everything exists very much in the present – visibly, audibly, tangibly, etc. – and in clear relationship to everything else, yet there is no categorisation, no designation, no allocation. Yamaguchi builds a bridge from the holistic nature of experience to theory: 'Theory arises solely from practice. Although theory thus arisen influences

practice, the theoretic interest of observing the context loses its standpoint of disinterested observation in creativity's training process, which has now become holistic and, liberated from its self-centredness and *Leib*-centeredness, is completely detached from *Leib*-spirit dualism. Precisely such a practice is what allows theory to undergo continuous renewal.' (Yamaguchi, 2011)

I believe this renewal or expansion develops from the attention given to the *ambiance of the body*. Every impulse originates in the body and emanates from there until it is acted upon either consciously or implicitly. The approaches used by Gendlin, Storch, Pieper (Gendlin, 2015; Storch, 2006; Pieper, 2015), etc. suggest that attentiveness to the *body-space* addresses and liberates *individual knowledge* in its *more holistic* form. I consider these approaches as path-breaking when it comes to advancing the following developments:

- the inclusion of body-centred methods in order to develop more holistic procedures, solutions and research strategies
- the integration of artistic processes in order to generate a sense-based interface to the *world and perception* and to juxtapose that interface with more rational methods
- the personal consideration of the *atmosphere of the body* as an opportunity to improve the quality of one's own life by experiencing the relationship between the body atmosphere and environment in a logical and *meaningful* way – similar to the contexts that Gerald Hüther describes or that Hartmut Rosa develops in his 'resonance theory'.

The analysis of the *logical processes* discussed in Area B that can be experienced while sensing and acting in relation to the environment is – transposed to exploratory settings – meant to provide information about the structure of atmospheric perception. The *atmospheric* in the field between practice and theory can be both researched and presented, starting with the *ambiance of the body* and moving on to physical movement situated between conscious and unconscious action, and then to the configuration of the surrounding space.

### *Movement and language*

Following from that, the question arises, I would say, of how different systems – the system of language and the non- or preverbal, the conscious and the *preconscious* – relate to each other, or can be set in relation to each other, from an ontological point of view. The statement by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone that 'the essential reality of language – that no language can be spoken for which the body is unprepared – and its consequence: to understand the origin and evolution of a language is to understand a sensory-kinetic lifeworld' (Sheets-Johnstone, 1990) must be expanded upon by noting that understanding and the methods of representation must also be realised on the level of both language and the sensomotoric relationship to the environment.

How do I introduce movement into the text? How do I write while in movement and while perceiving the movement that continually causes everything to undergo and remain in a state of change? Nothing is fixed. Nothing is truly certain. From the perspective of movement, thought can no longer proceed in linear fashion, nor movement in patterns. How far can a person go in his or her thoughts? How far in his or her movement?

## *Totality of experience*

Theory, artistic and scientific method and artistic action can converge. What I can only intimate in this written text is transformed in the *lecture* into a '*totality*' of *experience*. In this regard, I would like to generate momentum on behalf of the non-foreseeable by quoting Pascal Amphoux: "Et de cette façon-là trouver des façons de légitimer, de modéliser et d'inventer des modalités d'expression de nature différente, multimédiatiques, qui permettent de mieux couvrir, le champ de l'Ambiance, en en faisant sentir quelque chose, et non seulement en en expliquant le sens." (Amphoux, 2004 : 138) I am speaking about experience. Speaking from the *body-space* touches upon 'totality'. Using the language (of the body) to go to the limit. Holding myself at this limit – this border between word and movement, language and action – and, once there, beginning to sway gently.

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