

## Body Space – by Lucas Derks

The body itself is a three-dimensional structure in which the nervous system connects everything with the brain in such a way that the body can be sensed en moved. The so-called “Embodied Cognition Theory” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Bergen, 2012) states that bodily experience forms the basis of all (higher) cognitive functions. This means that all we know and think is mainly learned along with becoming capable of holding and moving our body in physical space. For instance, finding our balance in early childhood can become the prototype for a life style of balancing out things in adulthood.

The important role of the body as measure for everything that we encounter was easily overlooked. Since the experience of the body is always present in normal states of consciousness, people tend to only experience deviations from their habituated bodily proprioceptive sensations.

Body experience must also be laying at the foundation of our conception of space itself. This concept formation probably starts within the womb, as the embryo swims around weightlessly between the outer walls. In there, the preverbal distinction between “here” and “there” might be a logical start for the concept of space. Since the eyes, the nose and tongue are at the “front” it is easy to distinguish it from the “back”. Once born, gravity starts to help create the distinction between “up” and “down”. However “left” and “right” may remain tough for a lifetime in some people. Moving around with the body helps create a number of very fundamental concepts (Tversky, 1991; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Bergen, 2012).

The body as a spatial structure stands in the foreground when psychotherapist let their clients “focus” on *where* they do sense something. The kinesthetic part of the experience of a problem state is always felt somewhere and also in all kinds of other kinesthetic qualities, like weight, temperature, pressure or movement. Therapists and clients alike use the kinesthetic part of experience as their reference for therapeutic progress and its location is often part of that. For instance, if the bad feeling moves downwards from the head to the belly, this may be seen as possible sign of progress. Although in general, it can be enough to know whether the clients feels better or worse, the location of the feeling may be also meaningful.

Eugene Gentlin (1978) developed the so-called “focusing” method. Historically this form of psychotherapy came up at the beginning of many modern approaches, of which NLP is the most well known. Finding the spot where a so-called “felt sense” is located in the body, is a standard step in focusing. From there the client is often asked to associate with concepts, memories or metaphorical images. These will be mainly auditory and visual and appear in the awareness space somewhere outside of the body. Therapists, who

practice focusing, become automatically familiar with many aspects of mental space. But they often tend to reduce themselves to the kinesthetic side of spatial awareness, and see the visual and auditory parts as instrumental to that. The value for psychotherapy, of paying attention to the locations in the body where problem-feelings are sensed cannot be over estimated.

The theory that sees all cognition as being embodied is implicitly applied, in most martial arts and also more explicit in the Feldenkrais method (Feldenkrais, 1977; Ernst & Canter, 2005; Keatz, 2014). This educational type of psychotherapy also uses body exercises to solve mental issues. This psychotherapeutic approach builds to a high degree on the unity of body and mind. The same concept of oneness is present in many oriental healing practices and also in NLP and approaches that call themselves “holistic”.

Body movement in the shape of, dancing, running, juggling, balancing, jumping and climbing have all been used as a way of “something completely different” in various psychotherapies. A good example is found in John Grinders so called “New Code NLP” (Grinder & DeLozier, 1987; Bostic StClair, & Grinder, 2001). For instance, the therapist has the client first access his problem state to next do a ball throwing and catching game with him. The incompatibility of physical play with worrying makes it a great pattern interruption.

Rock climbers report that their sport is all about making at first unconceivable 3-D moves. To get up a difficult piece of rock, a climber needs to discover how to move his limbs and torso by creative experimentation and by social copying. At the limit of their skills, climbers are with all their senses in the present and have very little inner imagery or dialogue. But when some personal issue is bothering a climber he knows he will not come far up the climb. That is why most successful climbers train themselves to get into and stay in very lighthearted states of mind.

An activity like rock climbing is incompatible with a problem state. But when a person is in a problem state, (easy) climbing activity can work as a strong “something completely different” (Mehlhorn, 1999). We see this also for others with boxing or playing golf etc. Breaking the boundaries of habitual movement seems more than a metaphor for overcoming mental limitations.

### **Crucial experiment 3: Writing in Space.**

By David Keatz, Feldenkrais practitioner.

#### **Preparation:**

- 1) Sit on the tip of your seat and slowly draw 4, 20 centimeters wide circles with your nose in the air. First clockwise and then anti-clockwise.
- 2) Next, write your name with your nose in the air.
- 3) Pick a psychological issue and name it with one single word.

**Continuation:**

- 4) Open yourself for experiencing the negative feelings that belong to this issue: associate in the problem state.
- 5) Sit on the tip of your seat and put both your hands, fingers locked, behind the back of your head with your elbows pointing straight forwards.
- 6) Write the word by which you have named the issue in the sky with both elbows pointing forwards in parallel.
- 7) Write it with large letters. Do the same again but very slow. Do it one more time standing and also with an even larger letter-height (of 50 centimeters). Repeat this twice very slow.
- 8) Now observe while you do the last thing again, where you experience any kind of obstruction in your movement. Then focus on these obstructions.

**Evaluation:**

- 9) What do these obstructions in movement tell about your psychological issue?
- 10) Test the effect of this exercise on the intensity of the feelings about your issue.

**Conclusion:**

This technique forces the clients to create nearly whole body movements that they probably never made that way. The movement is new and it thus must necessarily elicit some new mental tracks too. Whether these are relevant for the solving of the issue is hard to say. But this does not seem to be a very critical point.

Body oriented types of psychotherapy can be based on a great variety of theories and philosophies. Only few focus on the concept of space, most use metaphors of energy and vital powers. To move in space, is what happens anyway when one moves his or her body. However, when looked at from the perspective of MSP, chakra stimulation, acupuncture and martial arts-like exercises, all are spatial activities. They all may be used as “something completely different” on top of a problem state.

Focusing on the body awareness in the problem state (Gentlin, 1977), is in itself already a strong “something completely different”, since most clients do prefer to attend to other things than their exact negative feelings.