



Perception as embodied dynamic and bodied consciousness

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Introduction: The pedagogical gaze

When we meet teachers who can tactfully create a productive teaching/learning atmosphere with clearly structured phases, it is wonderful to see how the way they follow the life in the classroom with their gaze seems to carry everything that goes on. When such a teacher enters the classroom, they will perhaps catch a student's eye and, smiling, mime chewing gum while pointing to the trash can. The student somewhat glumly but without hesitation removes the gum and brings it to the trash can. And when a student makes an interesting comment in a class discussion that is in need of further elucidation, the teacher encourages the student to continue with a friendly, interested glance. A simple hint of support may help them to express their thoughts more articulately or more strongly.

The supportive, understanding gaze of the teacher creates space. It does so without overstepping the boundaries of pedagogical tact and, because of this, creates a learning atmosphere that challenges students and strengthens their will to learn. They recognize that their striving and their growing skill is a source of joy and interest for the teacher. This is what comes to expression in the pedagogical gaze: The way the teacher sees the students gives space. This space is shared by teacher and student through the way they both focus their attention on the lesson content.

In other moments when, for instance, even the simplest private conversations are out of place and need to be prevented before they begin, it is the objective, watchful gaze of the teacher that lets students recognize this. The students see how their behavior is seen. This creates boundaries for their actions. When demonstrating experiments, the fascinated gaze of the teacher plays a central role. Their fascination for the way nature, in the finely focused context of an experiment, brings itself spectacularly to expression draws the students' attention to what is happening before them. The seeing of the teacher has these different facets. It can express fascination, be objective and watchful and, most importantly, be friendly and interested and create space. It has an interpersonal dimension that weaves through a lesson, giving it a specific atmosphere. At the same time, it is a deep personal expression of the teacher themselves.

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The genuine, personal dimension of the interpersonal gaze

Martin Buber (1999) showed in his book *The Dialogical Principle* how the loving, space-giving gaze gives birth to relationship in a deep, fundamental way. He ventured that people have feelings that can accompany love in very different ways. Love itself is, however, not a feeling. It is an event. It is an immediate presence that forms a present, which lets the “You” be free, gives it space while at the same time becoming “I”. In Buber’s conception, the interpersonal and the personal dimensions of the loving gaze have a theological significance.

Amaryllis Fox, a former CIA agent, describes in her memoir *Life Undercover: Coming of Age in the CIA* how she came to recognize the interpersonal reality of the personal signature of the loving gaze. She was stationed in Shanghai as a CIA agent. During this time, she was under constant surveillance. She had to always play the role that the operation demanded of her and do so in a manner that was absolutely convincing. At the same time, she is mothering her new-born daughter Zoë, who against all expectations does not develop any eye contact with her mother. Fox describes this:

“Only nobody briefed Zoë on the mission, and she doesn’t play her role right, doesn’t do the things in the book on the day that she’s meant to. And deep inside my stoic, silent exterior, I begin to panic [...]. Eye contact, the book says, that’s the first experience you’ll share. But we don’t. Not at all. And the harder I try, the more diligently my daughter avoids [un]locking windows and granting me access to her soul.” (Fox 2019, p. 189)

Between operations, Fox sits with her daughter in a Buddhist temple in Shanghai watching old women feed the koi. She describes how, in this setting, it was difficult for her to maintain her role as an agent and how she was able to let go of it:

“A fragment of me I can’t compel to pretend to be normal, pretend to be anything. A fragment of me independent and new enough to refuse to play some game of make believe.

‘I get it’ I tell her. ‘You’re not the theoretical baby in the book, who makes eye contact on day one. You’re Zoë, who makes eye contact when she believes there’s something real to see. You’re a raw human spirit in a tiny, brand-new spaceship, searching for the soul that is your mom. And so far, your sensors haven’t found her. I don’t blame you, you know. I’m not sure where she is either.’” (Fox 2019, p. 190 f.)



“Then one day, sitting at the temple, I lose my train of thought, completely absorbed in following a koi as he nibbles the pellet offerings bombing on the water, I’m smiling, without meaning to, and instead of returning to my confessions, I say, absentmindedly, ‘We probably look really weird to that fish, huh, Zoë?’ And when I look down, her eyes find mine and she smiles.

[...] And I see through the eyes of a fish. By accident, really. And in that moment, my daughter’s sensors find me, her real mom, fear and anxiety stripped away, childlike and joyful [...].

I start laughing. And she starts laughing. Her huge green-brown eyes looking steadily back into mine. And I’m flooded by a sudden, forceful wellspring of connection, like I’m exploring eternity. [...] And so it is that I learn that Zoë sees me when I forget myself.” (Fox 2019, p. 191 f.)

The episodes that Fox describes in her autobiography present us with phenomena of resonance between a mother and her daughter that Thomas Fuchs terms “intercorporeal resonance” (Fuchs 2000, p. 246) and the “intercorporeality of mother and child” (p. 275). Fuchs characterizes physiognomic expression as a process through which “something comes to appearance through the visible, tangible body of another that is not identical with the anatomical structure, but which cannot be separated from it. [...] The countenance of the other becomes expressive when I neither regard it as the surface of an object nor symbolically as the mere ‘tracks’ of what is going on inside them but only when I perceive it as the immediacy of them bringing themselves to appearance. In their gaze, in their looking they become themselves visible.” (Fuchs 2000, p. 244)

Zoë experienced her mother Amaryllis in her immediacy in the moment she became visible, when she stopped playing a role, when her facial expressions ceased to be the symbol of what she was required to be as an agent. She was free of fear and nervousness and as open to the world as a little child. The openness of her gaze created the resonant space of mother and daughter. Within this space, true encounter and eye contact was possible. Amaryllis gazed into the world and, in doing so, became visible. Her personal presence was genuine and immediate. Her joyful, child-like openness for the world resonated with Zoë. She emulated mimetically Amaryllis’ happiness and her laughter, laughing with her spontaneously. She felt her mother’s experience in her own body, which in turn led to an intensification of Amaryllis’ embodied experience of her child. — Fuchs termed this form of intercorporeal resonance “mimetic resonance.” He characterized it not as a form of reflective imitation



but as a form of imitative correspondence: a moving with that in its reciprocity becomes “intercorporeal communication.” (Fuchs 2000, p. 248)

In intercorporeal communication the body takes on a fluid, inner dynamic that “can at any time reach out and merge with what is perceived.” It appears as the “connection of two lived bodies and their dynamic. The bodily resonance of feeling becomes the intercorporeal resonance of expression and impression. The lived body is a body of resonance. It lets both the movements of one’s own soul and what resonates intersubjectively become audible.” (Fuchs 2000, p. 248)

As a self-reflective, intentional individual, Amaryllis Fox can have a dual relationship to her body. She can take hold of it spontaneously, forgetting herself and being completely in it. And she can also use it as a medium through which to play a role. In the first case, her facial expressions are authentic; she presents herself as she is. In the second case, they represent the role that she is given to play. According to Constanze Rora’s (2010) exploration of embodied learning, in the first case, her body is the presentative symbol of her personal presence and, in the second, the discursive, objective symbol of her role. When the body appears as the presentative symbol of personal presence, it takes on a fluid inner dynamic. This opens the resonant space in which it can unite with what is perceived. It is clear that this embodied form of a personal relationship to the world has a self-forgetting, space-creating component. It is this component that makes it possible to craft spaces of resonance. The will, that takes hold of the body in as a gesture of spontaneous personal presence becomes a relational force.

This is also the basis for the experience we can have in a theater when the “fourth wall” between the actors and the audience collapses and the embodied co-presence of actors and audience becomes intensified, more strongly experienced and takes on a quality of personal reality. (Fischer-Lichte 2012, p. 54 ff.) This can also resonate in the classroom in the friendly, space-creating gaze of the teacher. The genuine personal dimension of seeing and being seen is not as direct as in the intercorporeality of mother and child, remains, however, a fluid, inner dynamic capable of opening spaces of resonance.

Shared attentiveness and the interpersonal dimension of looking

We can apply the work of both Fuchs (2000) and Riethmüller (2019) somewhat freely when considering the way Zoë appropriated world and came to an experience of self. When she lay in the baby carriage, she would have discovered through the uncoordinated movements of her arms and legs that her cover and the walls of the carriage offered her some resistance. She



experienced pressure when she came up against the edge of the carriage or kicked off her blanket. She would have experienced that her legs were hard or impenetrable in a manner similar to the walls of the carriage. With time, she becomes conscious that she is not only the body with its uncoordinated movements but that her moving legs and arms are also objects as are the walls of the carriage. In this sense, she awakens to the fact that she has a body. The 3rd-person-perspective that she also has a body arises from the experience of her bodily movement.

When Zoë begins to not only touch and come up against objects but also to point to them, her object-like, living body relation to the world is already quite developed. When she moves her arm to indicate the presence of something, we perceive a different kind of bodily movement. It has a symbolic character and is based on a focused, object relationship to the world. When Zoë seeks assurance by looking to see if her companions are also looking at the object, the experience of shared attentiveness or perception gives her a sense of certainty that the object world is there for everyone. She can continue to develop her relationship to it. Her sense of her surroundings as a stable world of objects arises from the experience of shared attentiveness or perception (“joint attention”). It arises from episodes in which she gains assurance from the experience of sharing her perceptions with others and the sense that everyone involved is perceiving the same thing.

Finally, Zoë experiences in the way others look at her how she is perceived by others. At first, this is something she simply must (in an Aristotelean sense) suffer. Objectifying looks send her back into herself, fascinated looks draw her out. We can hope that she finds the space in the loving gaze of her caregivers — as was the case in the Buddhist temple in Shanghai — to experience her embodied nature in a manner that allows her to be at home in herself. In this sense, she also has the others to thank for the happiness of her childhood and the inner surety of embodied existence. At the same time, it is her joyful childishness that opens this space of resonance for those around her. The ingenuous nature of her gaze invites their authenticity; in her gaze, they see themselves as they are. — Such moments are quite wonderful. The ingenuous gaze is at once a loving, space-creating gaze that bears the possibility of seeding a deep form of interpersonal relationship, making it possible for us to find ourselves within ourselves without the obstacle of a sense of objectifying foreignness. This begins immediately after birth with the first eye contact between child and caregiver. The experience of an object world comes later. When we learn to know ourselves simultaneously both as a lived body (body we are) and a living body (body we have) through the experiences of touch and movement, this double aspect of our relationship with and to our body



can become the basis of developing consciousness of an objective, real world existing around us. The experience of shared attentiveness or perception takes on a bridging function. The world that each of us has for ourselves is shared with others. For this to happen, we must also be aware of and understand the others who turn their attention to the object that has captured our own.

Our own experience of embodiment rests on the senses of touch and movement. It forms the basis of a bodied consciousness, which allows us to experience the other — in moments of shared attentiveness or affectivity — as existing outside of myself. This experience is quite strong and permeates all other corresponding sense impressions. Place your finger in front of your eye and move it slowly away from you. It grows smaller in your field of vision. Yet our bodily experience is that the finger remains equally large. The objectifying gaze grows wider. We can look into the distance. Objects that we experience as being the same size take up a large amount of space in our field of vision when they are close, less when they are further away. We can say that, in this sense, perceiving distance rests on a bodied consciousness of different forms of embodied relationships with the world: seeing or glimpsing, a sense of embodiment, moving and, in some cases, touching.

The world becomes richly sensuous in the shared perceptions of the fragrance of a rose, the sound of a bell, the warmth of a burning log, the light of a fire. We can place ourselves in such a relationship with the rose, the bell, the burning log or the fire that we experience its fragrance, its sound, its warmth, its light. We can, however, also place ourselves in such a relationship with the world that we perceive the object rose that has fragrance, the object bell that sounds, the object log that gives off warmth, the object fire that gives off light. We can move freely between the sensuous experience of the world and the primarily objectifying relationship. If the world is to appear sensuously rich and colorful, we must be careful not to think that the sensuous is merely an “add-on” to be noted or registered from the perspective of object thinking. The sensuous lets the world come into appearance; we can let it do so with “childlike joy”.

The countenance of the other becomes expressive when “I neither regard it as the surface of an object nor symbolically as the mere ‘tracks’ of what is going on inside them but only when I perceive it as the immediacy of them bringing themselves to appearance. In their gaze, in their looking they become themselves visible.” (Fuchs 2000) When I perceive the other as a person, the objectifying aspect of me looking at them recedes into the background. The world does not only smell and light up with increased intensity. Something new — this someone — is present in the fragrance and the luminosity. This



act of someone coming to appearance takes on a new, personal dimension. In place of the shared stream of attentiveness experienced when looking at something with someone, the shared stream of attentiveness as intercorporeal resonance comes into the foreground. This is what we can recognize in the moment of eye contact between Amaryllis Fox and her daughter Zoë that I described above.

The interpersonal dimension of looking and seeing is shared attentiveness. In the direct, ingenuous encounter, each of those involved becomes apparent. Intercorporeal resonance is the embodied form of personal encounters through which I become conscious of the other as another.

Perceiving the other — Steiner's position in his pedagogical anthropology

Steiner (2020) viewed the perception of the other, as they become visible in their gaze and in their act of seeing, as a sensuous process. When we turn sympathetically with an ingenuous gaze towards the other, a process takes place that, according to Steiner, echoes what Fuchs (2000, p. 246) describes as intercorporeal resonance. Our own embodied experience merges with how the other becomes visible in their gaze and through their seeing. In this resonant conjoining, our own body with its inner fluid dynamic becomes the space in which we perceive how the other brings themselves to appearance, how they become visible. Our own embodied experience becomes the sense organ for perceiving the other.

According to Steiner, this leads to a second phase of perception that we do not find by Fuchs. Steiner calls attention to the fact that in the moment that our own embodiment gives itself as the basis for the perception of the other, the lived body loses its centric nature or what allows us to have a sense of ourselves as embodied and centered in the world. This loss is experienced as an attack and we respond by resisting the intercorporeal resonance. In this antipathetic, centripetal gesture we find again our embodied centeredness and our objective sense of being a self. This allows us to re-orient ourselves in relation to the earlier experience of intercorporeal resonance dissolving our sense of center.

The relatively quick, repetitive sequence of these two phases of perception leads to a bodied conscious of the other. The intercorporeal resonance is the embodied form of an interpersonal relatedness that simultaneously supports an objective or distanced consciousness of the other through the recreation of our embodied centeredness. According to Steiner the sense process itself results in a bodied, object consciousness that arises from the embodied dynamic of an interpersonal relationship.



Steiner termed the perception of the other the sense of another “I”. It could perhaps be termed the sense of “you.” He explores this sense at length in the passage cited above. The other senses are mentioned but Steiner does not go to great lengths to develop his own understanding of the senses and sense perception. He is more concerned with describing how the human being integrates the multitude of sensations into unified impressions that are perceived as though they are outside us. In his understanding, a bodied, object-based consciousness of our relationship to the world arises from processes in which a spectrum of the embodied forms of different sense impressions are brought into relation with one another. In this way, we participate in “the inner life of the things” around us. (Steiner 2000)

Steiner understands sense appearances from an ideational (spiritual) realist position. What comes to appearance in the sense world is the expression of the unmediated activity of the generative ideas themselves. From this perspective, it is logical to assume that the process of living with and bringing together the appearances of the world in sense perception and conscious recognition is one of participation with the generative activity itself.

In the sense of the other “I”, the entire lived body becomes a sense organ in the presence of intercorporeal resonance. A multitude of resonant, embodied sensations are brought together in the conscious perception of the other. Against this background Steiner’s in-depth exploration of the sense of the other “I” appears to be paradigmatic for the processes that lie at the root of all sense perception.

Embodied and bodied aspects of sense perception

Provided the considerations above concerning the sense of the other “I” are accurate, Steiner calls attention to a dyadic gesture in sense perception. We can repress a mere object-based grasp of the world through a centrifugal gesture of interest and focused attentiveness. In this case, the will activity focusing our attention becomes a force of relationship that enables us to enter into a resonant connection with the world. The sensuous nature of the apparent world can be present as such. It is embraced and carried by our sympathetic, “childlike” devotion to the world. In this resonant relationship, our lived body with its inner, fluid dynamic provides the space in which the sensuous nature of the appearances comes again to life. Its active appearing and its coming to life within the dynamic of the lived body is the co-presence of a process of resonance. In a centripetal, antipathetic gesture, through which bodied centeredness and object consciousness re-establish themselves, we become conscious of and distance ourselves from what comes to appearance. Elementary experiences, especially touch and



movement experiences from early childhood, reverberate in this process: “I am a body and have a body that is for me and for others a body among other bodies.”

Fuchs summarizes the personal dimension of this double aspect as follows:

“The general aspect-duality of a living being is specifically defined in the case of human beings as a ‘personal dual aspect’. A person is characterized as a living being in a position of taking a stance vis-à-vis its primary bodily existence. In this way, persons can appear to themselves and to others both as a subjective and a physical body.”
(Fuchs 2018, p. 80)

In the centripetal gesture described above we apprehend ourselves simultaneously as lived body and as living body, as subject body and as physical body. We are once more at home in our embodied centeredness. We apprehend this with bodied, that is object, consciousness. In doing so, we incorporate our embodied experiences through the shared presence of sensuous processes of resonance. In the act of incorporation, we apprehend the merging consciously and objectively (bodied consciousness). In the process of sense perception, bodied consciousness arises from the embodied dynamic of personal openness for the world, from embodied forms of personal resonance with the world.

The lived body as a symbol of its connection with the world

According to Fuchs (2000, p. 316 ff.) implicit memory is included in the embodied dynamic of focused personal openness for the world that we enact in sense perception. Whatever we have learned in such a way that we have it at our fingertips and no longer have to think about it is integrated into our embodied sense of self. In this sense, as embodied beings we are our past. In implicit memory as the memory of the lived body, the past, especially what we have learned, is present in us.

The way we learn and what we learn changes how we open ourselves to the world. The embodied dynamic changes and, with it, the way we enact the embodied forms of resonance inherent in our personal relationship with the world in each act of sense perception. Our perceiving can be rich and deep or express a superficial, insipid shared presence with what brings itself to appearance around us. This becomes especially apparent in the classroom or learning space, when the friendly, space-creating gaze of the teacher embraces the richness of the world of appearances. The way she looks opens a space of interpersonal resonance. Her space-creating gaze flows together



with that of the students', creating a connection with the richness of the world around them.

This trinity of shared presence between teacher, student and the rich texture of the apparent world is only possible when the teacher is able, on the one hand, to open the space of resonance through their personal presence in a way that captures the students' interest. On the other hand, it is necessary that the students' implicit memory provides a solid enough foundation for their shared presence. A lesson is lively and substantial when this is possible. The shared presence of everyone in the lesson makes it possible for the individual student to come to a bodied consciousness of what comes to appearance within the now resonant space. This consciousness is object-based and can provide a point of departure for conceptual explorations and focused reflections leading to the apprehension of essential relationships, laws or fundamental concepts.

The phenomenological approach in Waldorf education is designed to ensure that conceptual understanding grows directly out of the quality of shared presence described above. This is the pedagogical framework within which block lessons are to be understood. (Sommer 2010, 2014 & 2016) The way the lessons are structured is based on the anthropological understanding of perception I have described: In the process of perception, the embodied dynamic of our openness for the world is apprehended as bodied, object-based consciousness. In block lessons, conscious understanding grows out of the experienced shared presence in encountering the world.

The teaching method is structured in a series of stages. These reflect the qualities of bodied consciousness and embodied personal dynamic inherent in the process of perception. In this sense, we can say that the teaching method grows out of an anthropological understanding of human perception. Lessons are structured on the process of perception. Perception is a symbol for the phased structure. If the flow of the lesson succeeds, it expresses itself as a presentative symbol of the perceiving human being.

In the act of perception, we merge our embodied experiences in the shared presence of sensuous processes of resonance into an integral whole. In the act of integration, we apprehend the whole consciously in an object-based manner ("bodily"). According to Fuchs (2000, p. 107), we can do this because we are able to place ourselves in relationship with the primary nature of our embodiment. We can see ourselves both as lived body and as living body.

Steiner (2000) took an anthropological approach in his lectures to teachers and curative educators that sees processes through which the "I-organization" takes hold of its body in a person's capacity to relate to their embodiment.



If students walk into the classroom we experience the embodied presence of students in the way they walk as their personal presence. The way they move into and through the classroom lets developmental processes shine through, in which their personalities come to expression. When they walk, the resonant gesture of their relationship to the earth unfolds in a completely personal manner. This has both an embodied and a bodied aspect: In their uprightness and when they lift their feet from the earth, we recognize primarily an embodied dynamic; they live into and appropriate gravity. When they place their feet down, the more bodily aspect comes to expression; the body is heavy and falls.

Furthermore Steiner explores this interplay between body and “I” from a perspective of ideational or spiritual realism: Just as the entire materiality of the body is subject to the forces of gravity and thus expresses its relatedness to the earth outwardly as the tendency to fall in the same way other weighted bodies fall, so shall a spiritual instance inwardly take hold of the body’s substantiality and, in doing so, facilitate the consciously ensouled centering of the “I”. If we follow Steiner’s approach, the interplay of “I” and body — both lived and living — shows itself in an elementary, paradigmatic way in a person walk. It is also fundamental in the act of perception. Here too the embodied personal dynamic of an individual’s relationship with the world is present: This dynamic generates a resonant process. In a centripetal movement through which an embodied center and object consciousness re-establishes itself, we become conscious of what it is we perceive.

When walking, we have experiences of touch arising from the weight of the body and experiences of movement in the dynamic nature of our gait. These become a symbol for perception as bodied consciousness and the embodied personal dynamic of our openness for the world: In the way we have approached the act of perception in these essays, it shows itself as a process through which the “I” actively takes hold of what comes to appearance in the world in a series of embodied acts of appropriation and resonance. It then centers itself by re-establishing a bodied, object-based consciousness and apprehends what is perceived as something outside itself. When these processes take place in the way I have described, each act of perception unfolds as the presentative symbol of the fundamental relationship of “I” and body, a relationship that is inherent in the upright human gait.

In the ideational (spiritual) realist approach taken by Steiner, the resonant process of perception does only present a bodily dynamic but at the same time also an ideal or spiritual dynamic. The ideal or spiritual is immediately present both in the body as well as in what comes to appearance. The spiritual dynamic through which the world comes to appearance and the spiritual



dynamic of the “I-organization” form a spiritual unity. If we think of this dynamic and the unification not from a bodily but from a spiritual (ideal) perspective, it is apparent that we are not merely speaking of a form of external correspondence. The way perceptions are brought to consciousness is colored by the way the “I” takes hold of the body and the nature of its embodiment.

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