

A Virtual Street

Exercise day 1 of 3: Drawing Spatial and Bodily Sensitivities – a training kit

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Close your eyes for a moment. If this feels uncomfortable or uneasy you can start by looking vaguely to the space in front of you (not your screen for now), without focusing on anything particular.

Notice the way you are breathing. Do you feel your breath in any particular place in your body? Now that you attend to your breath, did something change?

Notice your posture. The way you are “holding yourself”. Can you feel the way you distribute your weight on the chair or surface you are sitting on or on your feet as you are standing?

Try to observe any bodily sensation – temperatures, rhythms (such as your heart beat), tensions, aches, tingles, pinches and so on. Notice the way the cloths you are wearing feel. Try to just observe for now. Don’t create stories in your head. For now, observe how your attention shifts, guiding it through the different sensations in your body, letting them linger now and then and observing how your attention may be drawn to things you observe in your surroundings, such as certain sounds or light, or certain thoughts you have. Don’t stick to any of these things. If you tend to do so, you can try to ease your attention back to your body, to your breath for instance. Try to do this for another minute: observing your body.

Slowly open your eyes, while trying to maintain the same sensitivity; the same attentiveness to your body. Shift your gaze to your computer screen. And take some time to adjust to it. Try to keep your eyes relaxed, relax your cheeks and jaw.

Welcome in our virtual street. As we guide you through this street, try to travel with us in your imagination and to keep track of how your body changes. As you explore where you are, try to draw what you observe, sense and experience. If you can’t find a way to draw these at the moment, try writing down quick notes. Try to notice how the places in this street may invite or require different ways of using or doing your body.

Imagine you walk through this street. For now, you walk with a sense of direction – you are not walking aimlessly –, though not too fast either. Notice your environment and give yourself the time to look around and get to know where you are.

Notice:

1. **SOLID MASSES AND THEIR TEXTURE.** Walls, the ground, traffic lights, benches, bus booths. More specifically, the smooth texture of the glass walls of a bus booth. The rough texture of the bark of a tree or a brick wall. How do different textures influence the way you relate to particular masses? What kind of textures draw your attention? How do different masses make you feel your body?
2. **LIGHT AND COLOUR.** The sources of light like the sun or colourful lights coming from a shop’s display, the shadows you or other bodies make in relationship to these sources, the way it reflects on specific textures. The way colour plays a particular role

in space. The way colours guide your attention and influence the way you feel. Or the way in which you feel may draw your attention to specific colours.

3. **SOUND.** Sound created by the environment around you. The sound of traffic, a barking dog, your shoes on the ground, a slamming door etc. Notice what these sounds do: How do they trigger your senses? Do they draw your body towards them or do you tend to go away from them? Do they produce memories or thoughts or certain kinds of attitudes? How do they make you experience this space?
4. **MUNDANE OBJECTS.** Maybe there is a bench with a waist bin next to it. Would you like to sit there? Why (not)? As you look at a building you are passing, notice: does someone live there? What do you see when looking at the window? Are there curtains? Are these open or closed? Maybe someone decorated their windowsill. Nose about and be curious about where you are. Try to be precise and take the time to explore things which you tend to take for granted. As you explore, try to reflect on how certain things draw your attention. How do they trigger your senses? What associations, memories, feelings do you have? How does your body feel? Keep on exploring these mundane things for a while and meanwhile try to uphold a dual attentiveness: attend both to your environment while also trying to keep track of how your body feels and changes. Feel your breath, notice your posture and any movements you make.
5. **SHAPES.** Notice the shapes of the objects and bodies in the street. Some of them are **round**, others are **angular** or a **mixture** of the two. Some shapes are **stationery** and some are **moving** through space. Become aware that your body also creates a specific kind of shape in space. Notice how your body can form a shape in space, but also together with objects in space and/or with other bodies in space.

Now turn around and walk back to the beginning of the street. Also turn around your paper. Again, notice shapes, mundane objects, sounds, lights and colours, solid masses and their textures. As you pay attention to these different aspects in space, notice also other bodies passing the street. Become aware that you do not only relate to the street but you also engage in **SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS** with the other people and objects. Notice the distance between your body and **other bodies (human and more-than-human)**, **groups** of bodies or between your body and **objects**. How do different spatial relationships (to objects and bodies) inform your movements? The way you feel? When does the distance between bodies and objects tell a particular story? How do spatial relationships inform you about cultures or normativities? What kinds of different **groupings** are there and what do they do? Which groupings suggest an event or emotion, or express a dynamic? How do different spatial relationships make you feel your body?

Try to draw different spatial relationships and, while you do so, become aware of what they do: to you, your body and space.

Walk back to the place where you turned around and walked back before. Turn around your paper. Again, you are passing masses and texture, lights and colours, sounds, mundane objects and shapes. Now, bring your awareness to the **FLOOR PATTERN** you make on the ground by walking through this space. To make this more vivid, you can imagine that the bottoms of your feet are painted in a colour of your liking; as you move through space, the

picture that evolves on the floor is the floor pattern that emerges over time. How does the physical environment and spatial relationships change your floor patterns?

Try to draw your imaginary floor pattern. Imagine how objects and people affect your floor pattern and vice versa.

Now, imagine the following situations:

The street turns into a street market. It is pretty crowded and you have to navigate carefully in order to keep an appropriate 1.5 meter distance from people. On the right and the left side of the street there are little stalls, displaying items that only vaguely interest you. You walk **indirectly** from one stall to the next. From time to time you stop to look at a particular item and you examine it rather casually to avoid attracting the stallholder's attention. In a way, you try to see without being seen. As the stallholder hovers near, you put the item down and saunter off. Notice, how you try to make your body small, while observing your surroundings, **gathering**, as it were, your body in space.

As you walk on you spot an old friend. You use your body to attract their attention. Notice how you **scatter** your body, making your body large and seen while you make your friend notice you. Once they notice you, you walk **directly** towards them, suddenly less aware of the people, objects and obstacles around you, opening your arms, making your friend feel that you are pleased to see them.

While picturing these situations, become aware of the space you take in with your body. Now, this may include more than your physical body. Notice how you can be **present** in different ways, taking in space differently with a large presence or with a small presence. Try to play around with expanding or contracting your personal space, your so-called kinesphere.

How could you document these different ways of taking and moving space?

After leaving behind your friend and the rest of the market, the street transitions into a place that is much less crowded. Observe how the street changes from a crowded place into a street where there is much more greenery and open space. How does this transition look like in your imagination? And how does your body change in this transition?

Imagine and try to draw this place.

Now, the left and right side of the street spread out through far reaching lawns, interrupted here and there by tall trees and green bushes. Notice your breath.

As you breathe in, you incorporate parts of the surrounding space. Sometimes this is fresh and crisp air. Sometimes the space you incorporate is warm and dense with pollen from the flowering trees. As you breathe in these pollen, you incorporate parts of your environment. You become one with the space. Where your body ends and where the surrounding space begins, becomes far less defined. You are losing your outlines, or at least: they become

permeable, less static and more fluid. As you walk and breath notice how where your body begins and where it ends may vary and may not always be determined by your skin.

Note or draw onto your paper what you imagine and feel when your boundaries get blurred.

Now turn, around, turn your paper and walk back, passing along the same street with its particular objects, bodies, spatial relationships and shapes. Recall the specificities of the different spaces you just experienced and the specificities of these experiences. Take time to attend to all the different things you became aware of just now. Notice what draws your attention most and linger in and explore interesting places and sensations. Let everything pass your awareness again:

- the way in which you experience the boundaries of your body,
- the way space changes and how this changes the way you use, feel and do your body,
- Imagine the way you are present in space,
- And whether you spread out and scatter your body in space, or whether you make your body small, gathering it in space,
- Imagine the way you move: making direct movement and indirect movement,
- Notice the floor patterns you make
- Be aware of the spatial relationships you produce with other bodies, objects or groups of bodies.
- And notice how the specificities of the space – the shapes, objects, sounds, colours, lights and the masses and textures – situate your body in a specific kind of way.

Keep on exploring these different sensitivities for another 3 minutes. You can keep watching the street on your screen or you can close your eyes and try to feel. Or you can revisit the places on your own map and add to your drawings and notes.

Now draw your attention away from this virtual place and come back to the space in which your body is present in this moment. Depending on whether you were looking at the screen, looking at your paper or had your eyes closed, draw your eyes away or open them in order to make them see the space you are in right now. Adjust to the light and spaciousness of this place. Notice your body; your breath, your posture and see if you feel the need to make some movements.

Look around and notice what draws your attention here.

Now return your gaze and attention to the screen.

Thank you for practicing with us!

This text is in part inspired by and/or quoting:

Bogart, A. & Landau, T. (2005). *The viewpoints Book. A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*. New York: Theatre Communication Group

Newlove, J. & Dably, J. (2004). *Laban for all*. New York: Routledge