

Given Together
Online Course, Spring 2016

Transition: Week 4 to Week 5

When we looked at the sense of distance during the last class, two of you observed that—in contrast to seeing—hearing as such did not really involve distance. When we assign a source to a sound, we automatically also assign it a location in space, and thus put it at a distance. But to do this, it seems we first need to create a mental picture of our surroundings—a mental space. In other words, distance, location, and separation all seem closely connected with our sense of sight. If space is physical (the container for physical things), it is also visual and mental.

Does this mean it is misguided to import the sense of space into other sensory modalities or into our mental realm (intentions, desires, thoughts, etc.)? It doesn't seem to be. But we do need to be ready to expand our understanding of space. And of course, that is just what we are doing.

Here is an exercise to explore this further. It's a 'walkabout': do it while you are out and about.

Exercise: Soundscape

Find a place you enjoy walking. Walk with a focus on hearing rather than seeing. How does this different sensory focus affect the way you inhabit space, or your sense of the space that you inhabit? Allow at least 15-20 minutes of uninterrupted walking for this exercise.

Here are last week's exercises to work with. They are presented as four stages of one exercise.

Feeling Distance 1

Look around the room at specific objects. At times, focus on one object for at least a minute or two. In each case, just get a sense of the distance that separates you from the object. See if you can actually feel the distance. The felt sense may be of something that is almost substantial, as though there were a rod between you and the object. It may also be linked to a sense of identity: 'there is a thing over there, and it is not me'. You may also experience the separation as a kind of density or heaviness.

Feeling Distance 2

Repeat the practice, but with respect to hearing. When you hear something, how does the sense of distance arise, if it does?

Feeling Distance 3

Repeat the practice, but with respect to the sense of touch.

Feeling Distance 4

Repeat the practice with regard to mental objects. For instance, do you have a sense of distance from your thoughts? Notice that you could understand this question in two ways: 1) Are you separated from the content of your thoughts? 2) Are you separated from the thought as such? Which one seems easier to explore?

Next week, we will continue to expand our understanding of what it means to inhabit space. We

are gradually working toward a vision of space in which all the senses, together with the range of our mental experience are all allowed by space and share in an intimate space-relationship.