

Mind, Body and Everything in Between: Implementing mindfulness in public performance

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What is space?
Week 1

What is space for me?

I can describe body as all that is present from me in the reality. My source of inputs and outputs but also “me” itself. Mind is also “me”, but only sitting inside the body and being part of it.

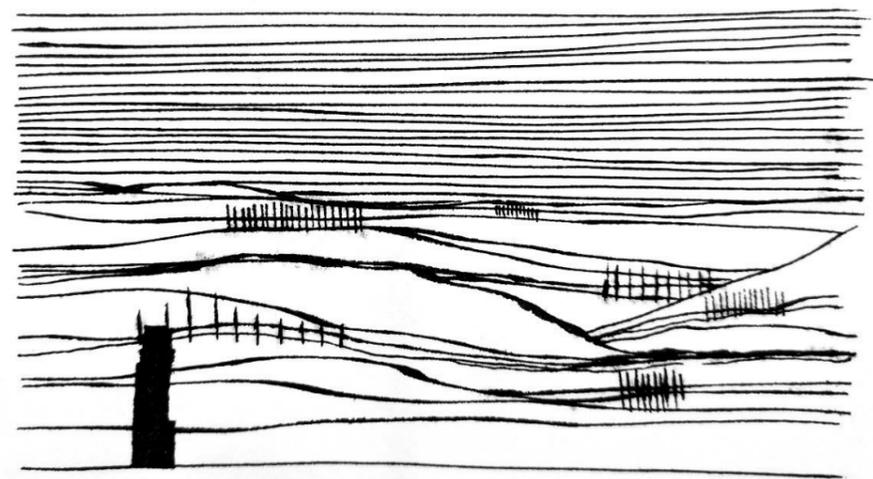
In my thoughts mind and body are very tightly connected. They influence each other constantly in different ways: bodily perceptions can provoke a change in how and what I think of and vice versa.

What is space for me? This is a hard question; space is probably 90 percent of what I see around me since I was born. Space can be opened or closed – it can be a room, big or small, or unlimited space like landscape.

Though when I think of landscape, I rather imagine it as a picture, not a space. Probably it is because we don't usually “run into” landscape when we see it. It gives us the feeling of freedom, but we almost never use this freedom. We simply pass by and stare into the distance for couple of minutes. Vast space usually affects me in a positive way but probably not because of its qualities, rather because of its vastness itself.

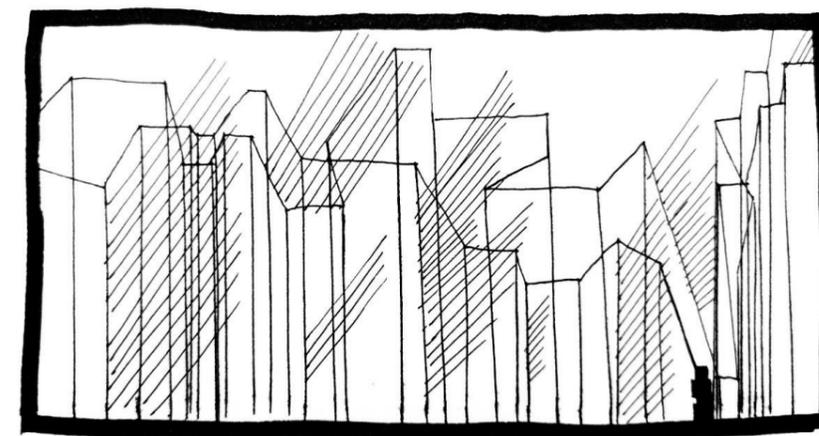
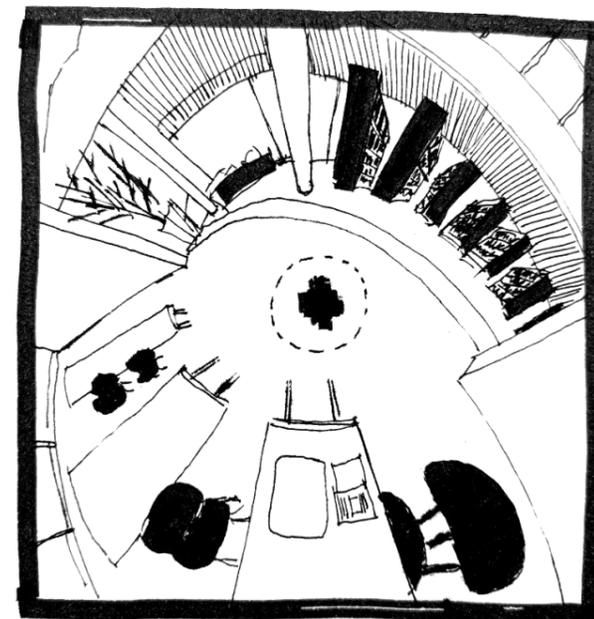
On the contrary if I imagine a human-size space I can't help but start to assess it qualitatively. Is it big enough? Isn't it too big? What are the proportions of this space? What is the most secure (or better to say stillest) place in this space? Of course, the biggest part of my considerations come from studying architecture, we deal with spaces all the time, moreover, we act as producers of spaces and try to understand them from inside out.

Emotions are the other aspect of perceiving space. I think my emotions completely change what I expect from space around me: if I am in a cheerful mood, I sometimes can become much more excited from an unfriendly environment. For instance it can be a really rainy and cold night in Saint Petersburg where all the streets look alike and endless and not so much happens on them, but I will still wander with pleasure there if I have good music in my ears. But if I feel insecure or anxious there are few places which can help me to feel cozy. They don't have to be known to me previously, it can be a calm side street or also a crowded square – both of them can produce a very friendly appearance.



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Breathing and Walking Synchronization
Week 2

My journal about the practice we have made on our own during the week.

Journal

Breathing and walking synchronization

The first place to try this technique which I chose was the Gauforum in Weimar behind the Atrium. I certainly passed by this place a lot of times but I have never entered it. It was dark, about 20:00, and I saw nobody there so I thought it would be a good place to start.

It was cold but not freezing and the sky was clear, I remember that the first idea that came to my mind was that it is a good place to stare at the stars.

I could relax and get rid of most thoughts pretty fast by noticing everything around me and breathing with objects. I had a hard day and I think it was good that I was doing this practice at the evening when I was exhausted.

It was hard to walk and think about how I breathe simultaneously but after couple of minutes I've found a proper pace and it got better.

At first I felt like I was exploring the space but when I concentrated on my pace and on how I breathe this feeling went away, I stopped being

curious about what happens behind each of the windows and was simply walking. When I lost this sensation I looked at the stars again and all unwanted thoughts vanished.

I got the feeling that it was very easy to move my legs, I could do that for hours without any rest. I became more aware of how my body moved through space - how I moved my legs, how I turn around the corner.

I could stay concentrated for about 15 minutes and started to get distracted after that so I left the place.

I don't know if it was a good idea to start with this night experience but it was very unique and I enjoyed it.

It is the next morning now and I took a ~~short~~ short walk to meet my friends. When I was going through Wannsee Park I tried to synchronize my breathing and walking and I succeeded in it almost immediately. ^{not}

It was sunny and ^{not} windy, the perfect weather. I think I could again feel better how I made my steps and how I was going on a small slope.

During the day when ~~it~~ it was still sunny I went on another walk behind Schwanseebad on the parking space. There were a lot of cars and also some people there. I started to breathe with objects and walking around. When I cleared my mind enough I started to walk along one street connecting to this parking. I was walking really slowly and noticed every detail I saw, heard or smelled. There were some cars on the road but their noise didn't distract me, it was loud but I perceived it as one object.

Then I turned to another calmer street and stopped there. I was still noticing everything around.

The feeling was very similar to the feeling I get

when I draw. I love to go outside and draw something and when I sit or stand at one spot for an hour the scenery around becomes so stable and coherent. As if it was a stage in theater.

During wandering I also got the sense of ^{coherence} ~~coherence~~ and that I am not only passing this place by but also that I live a small moment of time in this place.

15-11-2020

Today we met to practise together in a vast hilly field far from Weimar center. I made some short notes in another notebook and will rewrite them here.

The wind was probably the strongest force that I felt this morning. It surrounded me from all sides and made the experience more intimate I would say.

After I have loosened my muscles I understood that was not feeling them previously.

We were walking up and down the slope and I felt much stronger ~~the~~ how hard it was to go up the hill in the long grass. Sometimes I had a feeling I would ~~blow~~ drown there.

While walking in a circle the wind was blowing from different sides because we were moving and it disintegrated the feeling of being connected to something that is further than 20 meters away. The wind also mixed all other sounds into one, as if it was a single sound track.

What is walking?
Week 2

A study about different performers and the meaning of walking for them.

The thing that fascinated me was the number of different approaches to perceiving walking or wandering. Some will approach it as an artist and via a performative act will show how it is possible to perceive the action of walking. They show that it can be not only moving from point A to point B but rather that it can have the meaning itself.

They don't try to interpret the act of walking, but they try to fill it with a new meaning. Walking as life (Tehchin Hsieh, who was living one complete year without entering any house), walking as symbol and as a challenge (Marina Abramovich and Ulay who made walking along the Great Wall of China towards each other to a symbol of their unification), Alter Bahnhof Video Walk by Janet Cardof and George Bures shows how walking with a simple smartphone in your hands can create an illusion of being in another time and seeing the stories connected to this place.

After reading the materials I was particularly interested in persona of Tehchin Hsieh, although his performances are not explicitly based on the walking practice. I find it fascinating, how he must have changed his everyday life every time he started a new performance.

He first came to New York from Taiwan in 1974 and started his first well-known performance in 1978. He vowed to stay in one cage-like room for a complete year, being also not allowed to read, write or talk. The full year of complete boredom. Experiencing nothing that can stimulate the brain's work. During his next work he had to punch an office timecard every hour for the whole year. He could not leave the room with a punching machine for more than one hour. His main routine which was constituting his life became punching an office timecard. The next performance was living outside, again for a full year. Not being able to enter a house, room, shelter, tent or any enclosed space. Afterwards he continued with long lasting performances which questioned the durability of a person, his limitations and dependencies. What amazes me, is that Tehchin Hsieh never stopped doing new performances. For him it is not simply the way to understand his boundaries, it became way of living.



It's Time to Go
Week 4

A small performance “Hey son, we should go home now, stop playing”.



Fly Like Pigeons!
Week 4

We tried to represent with our bodies the sound of a swarm of pigeons taking off.



Walking with a drawn map
Week 4

I tried to navigate on Frauenplan having a notebook in my hands where I previously tried to draw what I was hearing.



Interpreting Heidegger
Week 5

This performance was my reflection on Heidegger's text "Building Dwelling Thinking".

On the page 11 Heidegger argues, that the space (“der” Raum) in mathematical sense is neither defined by spaces or places inside it, nor does it even contain them. These words summon in my head the images of completely cold, abstract, and regular mathematical grid which has no relation to anything else. The space is a coordinate grid, it is the basis needed for everything else to appear, but it stays unchanged and rules the objects and spaces, restricts them and does not let them interact with the space.

To say that we, humans, exist in and therefore reside the space would be a mistake. Residence implies communication with the surroundings, it means also to alter and to be altered. That is why the abstract notion of the mathematical space does not produce and helpful framework when we apply it to our emotional and physical connections with what is around us.

Meanwhile Heidegger introduces us to the idea of plural spaces: “The spaces, which we go through every day, are made for by locations; whose nature is grounded in things of the type of buildings”. This framework includes an idea of bottom-up influence: a multiplicity of things defines locations, which make for spaces. The German verb “einräumen” (make for) seems to me particularly important in this sentence. It has a root “raum” and sounds very material, as if something is physically positioning object on its place.

In my photo series I explored how positioning some things into the surroundings can alter it and create a new location and therefore a new space around this location. As it was equally so important for me to feel the emergence of this new set of relations in a space by myself, my presence in the appearing location was also crucial for me.

I have chosen three spots in Weimar and tried to reside them. The aim was to create a possibility for a new location to emerge, to observe the new relations it made. By placing my things from home and explicitly acting like it is indeed my safe place I could establish a really fast connection to the spot and at least for couple of minutes change its usual pace, direction, duration and aim.



Bad Berka
Week 6

We went to Bad Berka to perform some movements.







Making my Bed
Week 7

I was making my bed. Then I was making my bed slowly. Then I was making my bed in the other order. Then I was making my bed only in my imagination. Then I was making my table.

Covering my bed with a blanket.

BEFORE:

Almost every day I am doing this routine process.

I take the bedcover from my sofa where it usually lays during the night and approach my bed, its lower part. The wide coffee table stays just near the side of the bed, so I have to lean down and stretch my body over the bed so that I can reach at least its center with my hands. I pull all corners of my sleeping blanket to the bed's corners so that it is even in all parts. I pull two corners down, closer to the floor, because the blanket is a bit wider than the bed.

After the surface is even I take the bedcover and distribute it on the blanket. I do it a couple of times until it lays down well enough and then I straighten up and check that I am satisfied with the result. As the last step, I take the fluffy pillow from the sofa, approach the bed, and place the pillow on top of the bedcover, a little bit to the right or to the left.

AFTER:

I was feeling that I was using the same objects as I usually use for this ritual, but the goal of using them was different. Instead of completing the main goal (making my bed), I was performing each step of this ritual as if they were not connected at all.

Moreover, at each step, I was concentrating much more on how well I accomplish this particular step. I would pay more attention to blanket corners and any wrinkles on the bedcover for instance.

Even though I tried to do it well, I felt that the task got much harder.

REFLECTION:

I am writing this reflection in the evening and on this day I haven't made my bed yet, so I thought that it is a good opportunity to do this task.

I have put the bedcover on top of my bed fully consciously and mindfully, making a session of meditation before that. The main difference that I noticed was my attitude towards the task: if previously it had been an action which I had done simply to maintain the order, so it was like an almost compulsory part of the daily routine which I had established myself, now it seemed to be an action of a full value in it. I felt that I was noticing the details of this action not with the aim to achieve the perfection of the main task, but simply because it felt right to put some effort into something that I was doing now.

I also tried to understand if it somehow changed the notion of space in my room and it surely did, but it was not that feeling that I had expected. At first, I was looking for this kind of change as if I had "switched a toggle", for the change from state A to state B. But this was not the case - I felt that there were no predefined states A and B and that my actions affected the space of my room all the time as I was interacting with the bed. There are dozens of ways how to cover a bed with a blanket and how to arrange the items used during this action. Even if the aim itself was clearly and simply stated at the beginning as "cover the bed with the bedcover", the result was not just the accomplishment of this goal but rather changing the order of multiple things in my room with every move I make.



Performance with Mandarins
Week 7

Asking people to take mandarins from me on the streets of Weimar.

After considering what social role or what part of my identity I would like to question in this task I came up with an idea that I am often relying on people around me in terms of taking decisions and I am not the most initiative person. I very seldom organize parties, evenings, or dinners, never protests, demonstrations, or any other kind of gatherings unless somebody invites me or suggests going there. There is no one single reason for this behavior but one of the reasons is the unwillingness to show initiative and to say the first word, in a fear that nobody else feels like me or wants to support my idea. It gets much worse with strangers, whom I completely don't know and can't predict their reaction.

Therefore the performance I chose includes interaction with pedestrians on the street and bringing myself to the position of one who is posing a question first and waiting for a response from somebody, who may appear to be rude or not answer at all. The most fun and corona-friendly variant of such intercommunication that I thought of was distributing tangerines among some strangers on the streets of Weimar, and so I executed this idea, together with the help of Nadja in a role of a photographer.







Act of Kindness
Week 8

We were asking people in the villages near Weimar if they need any help from our side. That's how we found this guy that suggested us to chop some wood at his place.

Nadja and I wanted to collaborate and work on this assignment together. Among our first ideas were such actions as recording and collecting stories of people on the streets of Weimar, interactions with playing children or with wandering people in parks. After a little bit we realized that we were looking for opportunities to come into contact with at least somebody instead of really searching for a suitable topic of our act. We also had an idea to ring doorbells and try to get some attention of people by suggesting them to exchange something from their homes with something that we have found at our homes. Then we have realized that it does not have to be an exchange, the notion of trading and getting something in return doesn't seem very kind to us.

This is how we came up with the final idea – to simply ask people if they need any help and provide it for those who do need it.

We took a bus and went to some villages near the Schloss Belvedere, where we started to ask the people we saw on the streets for anything we can help them with – to throw away the garbage, to clean the road from new fallen snow, to walk the dog or anything else. Most of them were a bit confused and said that they are doing just fine and do not need any help.

On our way down to Ehringsdorf we met a young man and asked him the same, and after some considerations he told us that we indeed could help, so we went with him to his house in Ehringsdorf. He is living there with his parents and his brother and they have quite a huge territory for a small household. He introduced us to his mother who was sawing wood and after a small explanation how the saw works, she gave the protective headphones to Nadja and let her try to saw. At the same time, I started to chop wood together with the man we met. Meanwhile he told us that he just finished his travelling and we talked about our experiences of camping in other countries.

They had cut some trees and now needed to cut their trunks into smaller parts and chop them for easier storage. The work was quite exhausting but also extremely satisfying. After couple of hours, we finished the most part and it also got darker, so he invited us inside the house, and we stayed there for some more minutes drinking coffee and talking to the family. It was a wonderful and very calm evening, they also invited us to come later to a dancing party, but it was time for us to go and we also did not have time for it, so we left.







Perceiving Weimar Anew
Week 9

I wanted to feel the matter of the town better. To obtain the information about it anew. As if I have never lived here before.

I wanted to feel the matter of the town better. To obtain the information about it anew.

The place I chose to start with was Goetheplatz. There I sat down on a bench and was observing what happens around me. The Labyrinth Hostel, which is situated across the street, was the first place I stayed in in Weimar, and I tried to remember the feeling I had in the first day I came here: not knowing where everything is: grocery stores, Bauhaus, main squares, bus stops, pharmacy stores (still don't know). I tried to deconcentrate and pause all thoughts going through my mind and focus only on two bus stops on Goetheplatz, the main road, and the post office.

After half an hour I wanted to come closer to the bus stop and so that's what I did. What stroked me was the number of people passing me by. All people standing at the stop were waiting for something, I also decided that I need to await with them. I didn't want to break the feeling of being in the town for the first time and knowing nothing about it, so I turned on my imagination. I started to wait for the bus number 28. I was waiting for 10 minutes already, and the bus didn't even appear on the table with coming buses. I was becoming angry.

I left the stop and went in the direction I was imagining this bus to go. I've heard the bells ringing and thought that there could be a church nearby on my way so I hurried up this way. It was indeed a neat church with a high bell tower. I passed it by and continued my journey.

It was sunny and I imagined I am in a small Italian town during one of its coldest days. The sea was not so far away so I could feel the cold breeze coming from my right side.

I suddenly found myself in front of a wide road and a forest behind it. There also was a huge shopping center to the left of me with a bus stop in front of it. I imagined that it should be one of the central squares in warmer days when people spend more time outside. I would think I am leaving the town now if I didn't see the houses on the other side. The narrow road across the street attracted me the most.

I crossed the road and went up the hill. Behind one of the houses I've found a stair and a narrow path it was following to.

I climbed it up, made some steps to the left and saw a treehouse and some children playing on a playground. I continued my way, soon the houses were left behind and I entered a forest.

It was an unusual forest for Italy so I thought that I've moved to the north further than I thought. The road became dirty and it looked like nobody visited this place at all, I hadn't seen a human being for a while now.

As I was thought that I heard some sounds from the right and when I turned I saw some workers who were operating two excavators. I came closed and saw that there was a creek down the hill and they seemed to want to change its stream path. I observed them from behind the tree for some minutes but then it came to my mind that they can notice me and start to ask what I am doing here, and I even didn't know the language they were speaking. So I quickly turned around and went back.

I took the same way, so the breeze from the Italian sea was blowing from my left side now. I went down the hill and passed the same church. I went closer to the bus stop just to check if the bus number 28 will appear soon but it was still not on the table.

