

# Self-resonance and self-direction

With sound and language in dialogue with the self

by PD Dr. Uwe H. Ross

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**Summary:** *"I prefer to just be myself, but I don't get to be myself very often."* – Workload, deadlines, and efficiency pressures challenge our ego (acting deliberately, purposefully) and, over time, are exhausting. By contrast, the condition of "just being yourself" is characterized by presence in the moment, radiance, feelings of confidence, strength, vitality, creativity, joy, and ease of accomplishment ("as though by itself"). How can this condition be fostered? In the following article, we shed light on the opportunities afforded by sound therapy supported by language which, in a few steps, enables access to the self and aligns involuntary experience processes in a desired manner to relieve the ego and allow you to "be yourself" more often. In addition to self-resonance and self-awareness, the client's capacity for self-guidance is also promoted, i.e., the co-creative dialogue between ego and self that counteracts the daily "invitations" to self-alienation.

## Introduction

Given the increasing acceleration of our growth-focused, competitive society with limited time resources, there is less and less room for self-awareness and self-resonance and therefore a greater risk for alienation from oneself and the world (Rosa 2016). The above-referenced conditions of daily life continually trigger our rational ego, and – since it works comparatively fast – it takes increasing control of our way of life. Most people have convinced themselves that life has to be planned and controlled willingly, rationally, and in a targeted manner, in accordance with the motto: "Nothing works unless I do it myself. Nothing gets done by itself." The growing number of help literature available for

every facet of our life may indicate that, under the pressures of self-optimization, we increasingly search for advice in decision-making and how to act in the outside world (help books, internet), and have forgotten how to use and incorporate common sense or, even better, our intuition.

Our conscious ego is thus subjected to a massive flood of stimuli and information and is continually in action, spurred on by suggestions of inner drivers in our head such as: Be perfect! Be strong! Do it quickly! Stay with it! Please everyone! Following these imperatives ("I must ..."), we work on to-do lists day in and day out. Unfortunately, such a way of life and work is one-sided and, in the long term, exhausting, as it is associated with the activation of the amygdala and respective stress reactions. Today's common stress-associated psychological disorders, (burnout, anxiety, depression, somatoform disorders) can be understood as expressions of exhaustion of the rational ego and self-alienation. Signs of this ego exhaustion include feeling overwhelmed, helplessness, perplexity, desperation, loss of direction, difficulty in decision-making, frustration, disappointment. But these conditions of our times – characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA world) – are precisely the conditions that can prove to be initiators of innovation. When our intellect, our rational ego, cannot go any further with its concepts and knowledge to date, then new learning experiences and new horizons can be explored. On the one hand, this requires being present, and on the other, the courage to address these difficult feelings that the ego prefers to ignore, i.e., to get and stay in contact with your inner self instead of doing more of the same to be distracted or numb.

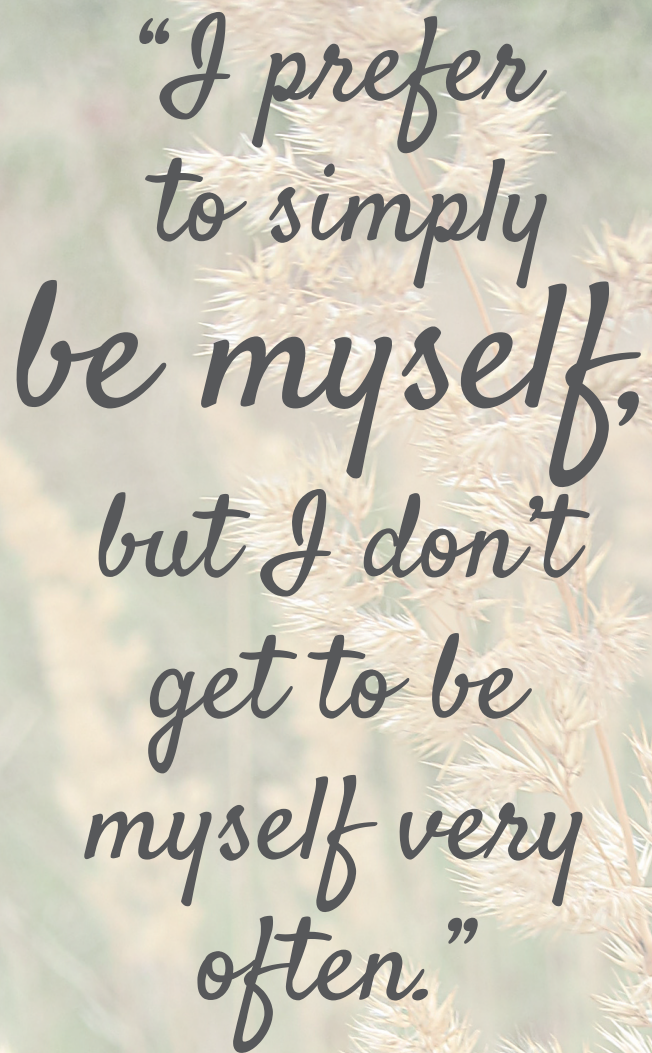


### What is this "self"?

There is no clear, universal definition of the self. What we refer to as "the" self in everyday psychology is not an ontological substance, but a changeable, dynamic process dependent on context (Metzinger 2012). According to today's neurobiologically-based definition (Kuhl 2010), the self is characterized by aspects such as automatic-involuntary, physical, emotional, intuitive-creative functioning. By contrast, the ego is associated with voluntary-conscious, rational functioning, linear-causal thinking, and results orientation. The self operates with huge integration capacity and enormous creative potential from the subconscious and is the primary "informant" of the analytical ego. Therein lies an enormous cognitive-emotional development potential: with good collaboration, the ego consolidates experiences of the self, focuses them, and searches for generalized rules that are then brought back to the self. Through this exchange of information with the ego, the parallel-functioning self receives continually more consolidated and increasingly "more intelligent" input and can thus continually increase its level of integration (Kuhl 2010).

### Definition of term: Self-direction

The term self-direction describes the highest level of experience-integrated, action-initiating powers consisting of self-awareness, self-control (ego-dominated, willful influence of the self) and self-regulation (favorable dialogue and cooperation between ego and self). It refers to an individual's ability to influence psychophysiological conditions, to make decisions, to determine one's own goals and to reach those goals while fighting inner and outside resistances. Determination of goals ideally incorporates a broad range of needs, feelings, values, and interests on both a personal and social level (Kuhl 2010).



*"I prefer  
to simply  
be myself,  
but I don't  
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often."*



Photo: Archiv Peter Hess® Institute



Application tip:

### Using the "wisdom of the body" – the body as supervisory power in language-supported sound therapy

According to the somatic marker theory (Damasio 2001), the body automatically and involuntarily reacts to outside contextual conditions (environment) and inner contextual conditions (thoughts, images, ideas, beliefs) with physiological responses, sensations and feelings, e.g. tension, anger, stress vs relaxation and wellbeing. These responses of the body can thus be viewed as implicit information, i.e., knowledge regarding harmonious satisfaction of essential needs. The presence of the cognitive ego is required to perceive and recognize these bodily responses, and to then mediate between the needs of the body and the environment to create a sense of harmony. In this sense, it is necessary to bring the client (better: the ego of the client) into an appre-

ciative dialogue with his/her self. The body of the client is incorporated as a knowing, helpful third instance (supervisory or therapeutic tertium) between the ego of the client and the ego of the consultant (triangulation).

In sound therapy, this can be applied as follows:

During sound therapy, the client is present and aware of the reactions of his/her body to the sounds and verbally communicates these back to the therapist continuously upon request. Feedback by the client then determines the next action by the therapist, i.e., the next type of sound. The therapist again asks about the reaction of client's body and delivers a sound accordingly. In this manner, a triangular communication pattern with continuous feedback loop that accesses the implicit knowledge of the body is stimulated. For sound therapists, this approach provides some relief, as the therapist is no longer solely responsible for the therapeutic pathway. Instead, the therapist can rely on his/her experience base regarding physical reactions of the client. Client reports the actions that are helpful and soothing, and those that are less so.

For the client, this approach has the advantage of fostering a dialogue between the cognitive ego and the physical self as well as training his/her ability to perceive and define (= appreciation) autonomic physical processes, sensations, and feelings. This optimizes self-perception and verbalization of physical-emotional sensitivities, which is essential for the primary and secondary prevention of stress-associated disorders.

Application tip:

### Questioning the body about resources

Through the following open-ended questions during sound therapy, it is possible to question the body, for example, about resources. Here are some ideas for formulating such a question: *"Allow yourself to feel a pleasant physical sensation or sense of wellbeing earlier or later... You can be curious about what this sensation might be..."* or: *"You can use the wisdom of our body and ask which resource, or perceptible quality relating to your issue might help you... and you can inquire as to what that might be..."*

The described approaches in sound therapy correspond to the holistic perspective of so-called embodiment, "embodied cognition" as core concept of an important new direction in psychology and psychotherapy.



Photo: Nicole Herkert

### Definition of term: embodiment

Embodiment, as a relatively young area of science, specializes in the embodiment of knowledge, i.e., the part the body plays in information processing. Psychological processes are also embedded in the body and, at the same time, our body affects our attitudes, emotions, and actions, often in an involuntary, subtle way (Tschacher & Storch 2010). The body is the platform for emotional and physical expression, "the mirror of the soul" as it were – and, in turn: the psyche is also "mirror of the body".

Within the context of the embodiment approach, it is presumed that human beings can principally perceive and process two types of codes: one in pre-symbolic form (physical) and another in symbolic form. The symbolic form has two types of expressions: the symbolic/verbal (letters/words) and the symbolic nonverbal (images) (Multiple Code Theory according to Bucci 2002). The information codes have differing content and processing principles. In order to bring them together, a kind of connecting link is required, the referential process (figure 1).



Photo: Nicole Herkert

According to Bucci (2002), psychological disorders are based on a disconnection between these three information processing systems and dysfunctional attempts to deal with this disconnection. The goal of psychotherapy is therefore to overcome the dissociation between the three systems and to restore the connection (Tschacher & Storch 2010, 2012).

### Language-supported sound therapy as embodiment in practice

In reference specifically to sound therapy, this means connecting the information level of the pre-symbolic, visceral-sensory code with the verbal-symbolic code through perception and naming of what is perceived. In this manner, a living, holistic connection and communication of body and spirit is created. Especially in patients suffering from stress-associated disorders, there is often dissociation between body and spirit, limitation in physical perception, and lack of ability to define physical reactions, sensations, and feelings – an expression of a certain self-alienation. Sound therapy accompanied by language, with its translation of the pre-symbolic, physical code into abstract speech, provides a broad array of development opportunities for clients in the form of:

- Training in body perception and body awareness,
- Verbalization of body reactions and sensations,
- Development of emotional communication capability,
- Dialogue with one's own body, and
- Increased self-confidence and self-trust.

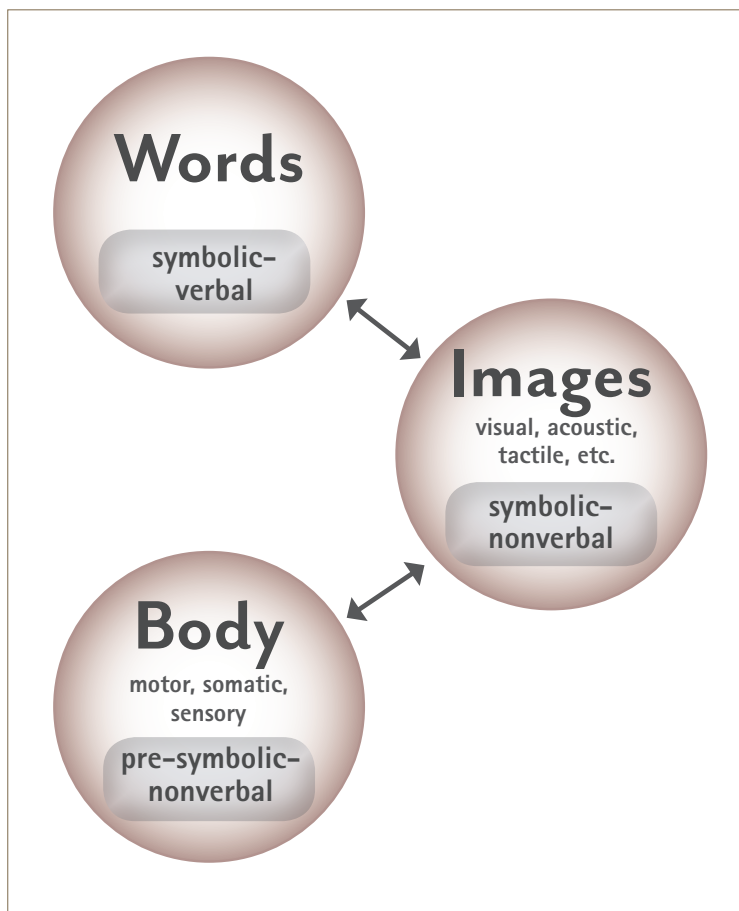


Figure 1: Self-referential process according to Bucci (2002)





Photo: Sandra Lorenz

## **Rational thought in everyday life and sound therapy**

Everyday experiences for most people are shaped by Newtonian physics of the material world as "hard reality". Everyday challenges are predominantly willfully conquered through rational thought: analyzing problems, setting goals, developing strategies and plans. Since Descartes' enlightenment in the 17th century "I think, therefore I am", the western world has a one-sided identification with thought, i.e., a disembodied intellect. With the increase in range and demand of functions of the prefrontal cortex as neurobiological representation of our "ego", we see an increase in the phenomenon of ego exhaustion as a stress-induced disorder (e.g. burnout, tinnitus, depression, anxiety). These disorders appear when our ego (our conscious mind) has reached its limits. Early symptoms of this include unpleasant states such as helplessness, perplexity, confusion, hopelessness, loss in perspective, desperation, disappointment, and frustration. However, what these states are really indicating is that the ego (rational thought) with its knowledge and concepts based on experiences of the past, does not know how to go on. On an experience level, we are treading on uncharted territory, where new opportunities for learning can be found. To make this possible, a benevolent assessment of these states by the intellect is required, such as "interesting, here is something new I can learn" or positive framing like "confusion is the bud of change". A benevolent presence is thus required to appreciate these states as impulses for new ways of thinking and acting. So that benevolent assessment can be made easily, it is important that the conscious mind is relaxed, revived, and energized. Every type of bodily-oriented relaxation leads to relieving the rational mind. The primary criterium of the so-called relaxation response (Relaxation response, Benson 1973) is an affective indifference, i.e., apathy in a positive sense, eve-

rything has the same validity / priority. Insofar, relaxation methods that emphasize the physical experience are helpful (e.g. also PMR) in relieving the ego. In sound therapy as well, physical experience takes precedence over rational thought or cognition. With regard to rejuvenation of the ego, this is initially helpful. Analog to second generation hypnosis (Ericksonian Hypnosis), rational thought, with its explicit processes in comparison to the implicit processes of the unconscious, plays a subordinated role, or is even regarded as disruptive in sound therapy as well.

## **The new role: rational thought as collaborate partner in language-supported sound therapy**

Different from the approaches of first and second generation (traditional hypnosis and Ericksonian hypnosis), the precursors of third generation hypnosis (Gilligan 2014, Dilts) deem a negative attitude towards conscious reason as unnecessary and hardly helpful. Instead, the intellect (ego) is viewed as a co-creative intermediary between the world of the creative unconscious (self) and everyday reality. From the creative collaboration of the conscious intellect and the proximal creative unconscious, a new, vital reality is created. In the western world, conscious reason functions generally as a disembodied, critical intellect that analyses issues, evaluates, sets goals, plans actions, and creates order and routines to achieve control and predictability. As such, it is a helpful tool for rational conquest of daily life. Other qualities and opportunities of the intellect can be applied in hypnosis and sound therapy: curiosity, presence, cooperation, translation and transfer of the results of an inner creative development process into everyday reality. In the sense of embodied cognition of the already-mentioned embodiment approach, the intellect can thus be integrated into language-supported sound therapy in various ways:





**1st Phase:** formulation of the request/order and formation of intention

**2nd Phase:** perception and naming of autonomous, involuntary bodily responses and affects

**3rd Phase:** ratification of experiences and transfer to everyday life

Since trained sound massage practitioners are most familiar with the second phase, the following focuses on phases one and three in particular (see p. 7)

### Definition of terms: Intention

Based on the controversies and neurobiological follow-up studies of the Libet experiment, it is presumed today that intention is not an immediate trigger of a specific voluntary action, but rather a structured origin that modulates a certain readiness for responses. Intentions configure sensory and motor processing systems in such a way that, upon certain stimuli, intention-contingent reactions can be activated automatically and effortlessly. Intentions thus make certain response patterns more likely than others (Goschke 2012) (Figure 2).

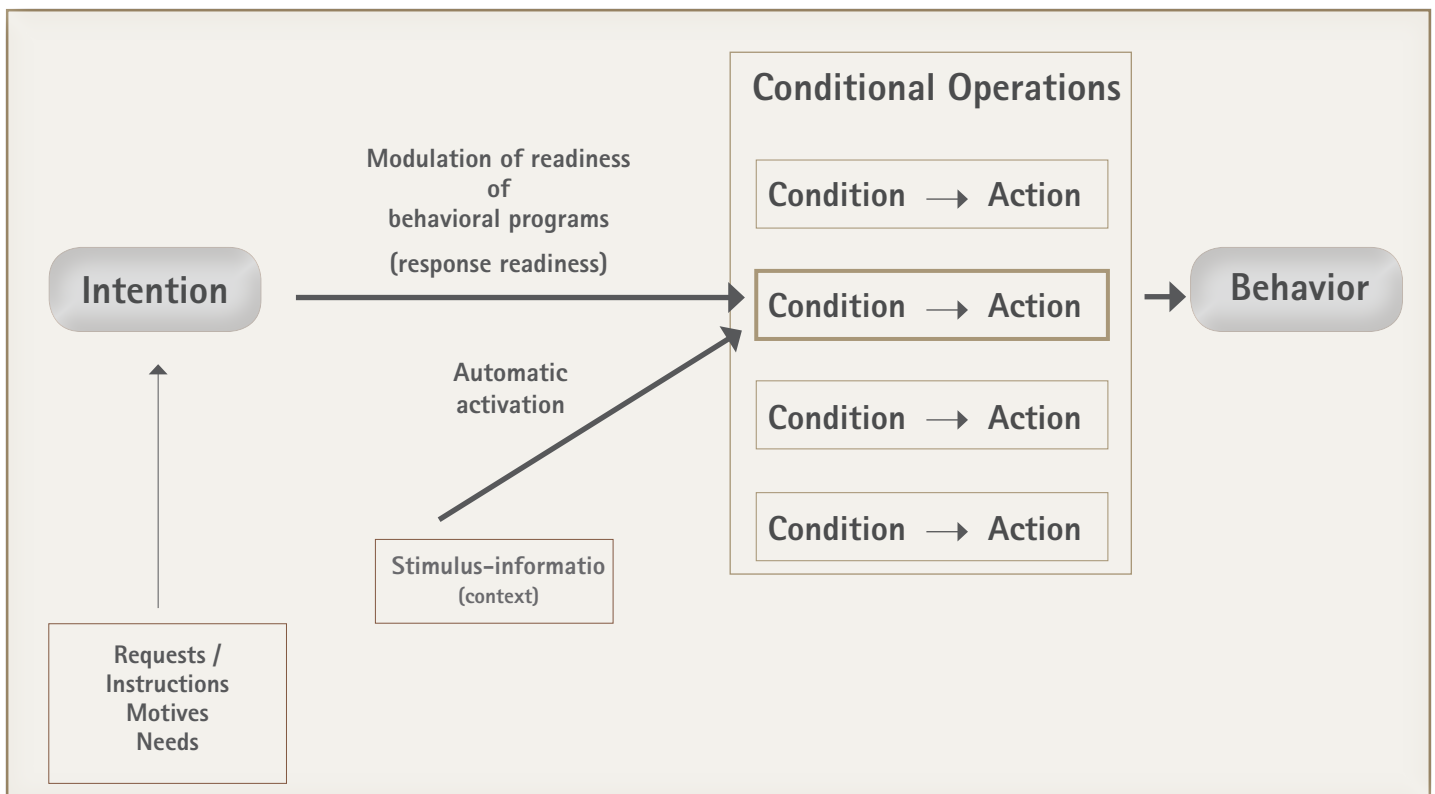


Figure 2: Intention as structuring origin for behavior (Goschke 2012)

## Intention in Eastern and Shamanistic thought

Eastern schools of Taiji (Schmid 2002) describe intention (Yi) as

- Directed consciousness
- Giving energy direction
- A condition of purposeful being
- A condition of permission, access

In Shamanism, intention also plays a significant role: a formulated intent forms the unyielding intention to perform

a specific action that has to be built up and supplied with energy. Since energy can be neither created nor destroyed (by Helmholtz, 1847), it can only be changed from one form into another. That which moves energy, gives it direction, is intention. To adequately formulate an intention, it is helpful to make your inner self empty, in order to choose from the ocean of possibilities and intentions from a neutral status of non-adherence. If intention is not formulated from a condition of non-adherence ("to want", "to desire", "to wish"), then adherence to results (functional fixation) often ensues.

Application tip:

### The three phases of language-supported sound therapy

#### Phase 1: Formation of intention (intentional self-guidance)

The first phase of language-supported sound therapy consists of clarification of the mission with the formulation of the mandate/request. Then, still in standing position because it is more present, follows the conscious formulation of intention from a status of being centered, along the lines of this pattern: *What I want to manifest most in my life is...* (maximum of five words). Then the resonance of the intention can be traced within the body.

#### Phase 2: Perception and naming of autonomous, involuntary bodily reactions and affects

This phase is about the translation of the pre-symbolic information code into the symbolic speech code (see above). The attentive presence of the client during sound therapy enables perception of autonomous bodily processes and affects as well as access to their implicit information through consciousness. During sound therapy, the client is repeatedly stimulated in a practical manner to name his/her body-related perceptions.

#### Phase 3: Ratification of experiences and transfer to daily life

Here, the client's experiences are summarily named and – depending on initial mission, mandate, and intention – associated with the subject and daily life; how to address challenges and first steps towards change are discussed.



## Outlook

As demonstrated, language-supported sound therapy offers many possibilities of avoiding the risk of self-alienation through conscious self-perception and self-resonance as well as through intentional self-guidance in the direction of self-congruent change. Conscious reason, the "ego" plays a partnership role in this process in the sense of co-creative collaboration with the body-oriented self. Application of language-supported sound therapy as described here can supplement or meaningfully expand other, also nonverbal approaches of the methodological repertoire of sound therapy, depending on the request of the client and background of the practitioner.



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