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Learning To Move With The Feldenkrais Method

An Introduction Of Moshe Feldenkrais' Ideas and Practice
in Contemporary Dance Education

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Introduction

This work focuses on the role that the Feldenkrais Method can play in the improvement of a contemporary dancer's proficiency. The information used in this work is drawn from various written sources as well as from my personal experience including the cited interview material. I have decided to write on this subject because of the great contribution that the method had to my personal improvement.

"Any (human) action consists of movement, sensory perception, feeling and thinking.¹"

According to Moshe Feldenkrais, improving one of these aspects of ourselves for example movement and sensation, leads in turn to the improvement of all the other aspects as well. In other words, since we are in motion at every moment of our lives, and supposing we would be willing to engage in learning how to improve movement, we would then hypothetically also be capable of learning how to improve all of our actions and to develop our whole self.

I have started to be increasingly interested in the method after a knee injury. Disability forced me into the search for different ways of approaching the organisation of my own body in order to reduce the pain. The slow, gentle, easy and attentive ways of moving turned out to be the most convenient to my needs, to my health and subsequently to my mental well-being.

The Feldenkrais Method emerged from the synthesis accomplished by Dr. Feldenkrais who, across his life, brought wisdom drawn from his own experience together with knowledge from a remarkable diversity of disciplines such as physics, neurophysiology, evolutionary biology or psychology. The aim of this work is not to analyse the method in its broad understanding, but rather to point out and to develop some of its propositions, which might be helpful in the process of a dancer's growth and progression regarding both her/his physical and mental development of self-image and identity.

¹ Feldenkrais, M. 1996. Feldenkraisova metoda: Pohybem k sebeuvědomění (Awareness Through Movement) Pragma

This first part of this work is conceived as a selection of some key concepts of the Feldenkrais Method such as efficiency, awareness or learning, which are commonly used in contemporary dance. All of the reflections on those particular key concepts have been predominantly inspired by the observations made by Dr. Feldenkrais himself.

The second part describes the Feldenkrais Method using detailed insight into one Awareness Through Movement® lesson (ATM). This class shows how those key concepts might be used in practice.

The third part inquires into the connection of the Feldenkrais Method with choreography, performance and research practice. These connections are highlighted by means of an interview with dancer, teacher and choreographer Georg Blaschke whose work has been greatly influenced by his long-term practice of the Feldenkrais Method. This particular part illustrates the chosen key concepts from the perspective of performance, creation and choreography.

Feldenkrais Method

“The Feldenkrais Method, developed over 40 years of research by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais is an approach for improving both physical and mental functioning through the exploration of body movement patterns and the use of attention. It is based on the brain’s innate capacity for learning and the potential for lifelong development and growth. Movement is used as the medium toward understanding our habits and identifying, learning and acquiring alternatives that promote ease and well being. The applications of the Feldenkrais Method range from reducing pain, improving neurologically based difficulties and learning disabilities, and increasing mobility to enhancing performance of professional athletes, dancers, musicians, and actors. People who come to do Feldenkrais are referred to as students, rather than patients, because learning underlines the basis of the method.”²

The first book of Moshe Feldenkrais *Body and Mature behaviour* discloses the great scientific background of the method. The author deeply investigates into human functioning, anatomy, behaviour, differences between human and animal and writes about discoveries that help us to get closer towards understanding ourselves, our needs and potential. Analysis of the human nervous system or for example of a Freudian psychoanalysis serve to Feldenkrais as a source of knowledge upon which he forms his method expressed in two parallel forms:

“Awareness Through Movement® (ATM) and Functional Integration® (FI). He designed his training to create balance within and between muscular tension, the cerebral cortex, the autonomic nervous system, and posture, together with our personal and social existence. ATM consists of verbally directed movement sequences presented primarily to groups. There are several thousands hours of different ATM lessons. A lesson generally lasts from thirty to sixty minutes. Each lesson is usually organized around a particular function. In ATM lessons, people engage in precisely structured movement explorations that involve thinking, sensing, moving, and imagining. Many are based on developmental movements and ordinary functional activities. Some are based on more abstract explorations of joint, muscle, and postural relationships. The lessons consist of comfortable, easy movements that gradually evolve into movements of greater range and complexity. There are hundreds of ATM lessons contained in the Feldenkrais Method that vary, for all levels of movement ability, from simple in structure and physical demand to more difficult lessons.”³

² http://www.feldenkrais.com/method/article/the_feldenkrais_method_an_introduction/, 17.07.10

³ http://www.feldenkrais.com/method/awareness_through_movement_classes/, 17.07.10

"ATM lessons attempt to make one aware of his/her habitual neuromuscular patterns and rigidities and to expand options for new ways of moving while increasing sensitivity and improving efficiency. A major goal of ATM is to learn how one's most basic functions are organized.⁴"

"Functional Integration is a hands-on form of tactile, kinaesthetic communication. The Feldenkrais practitioner communicates to the student how he/she organizes his/her body and hints, through gentle touching and movement, how to move in more expanded functional motor patterns. The Functional Integration lesson should relate to a desire, intention, or need of the student. The learning process is carried out without the use of any invasive or forceful procedure. Through rapport and respect for the student's abilities, qualities, and integrity, the practitioner/teacher creates an environment in which the student can learn comfortably.⁵"

⁴ http://www.feldenkrais.com/method/awareness_through_movement_classes/, 20.07.10

⁵ http://www.feldenkrais.com/method/functional_integration_lessons/, 02.08.10

Awareness and Learning

“Learning is experience. Everything else is just information”

Albert Einstein

The state of awareness implies the recognition that something is going on. Having knowledge or perception of a situation or an actual fact. Feldenkrais⁶ defines the process of learning as the acquisition of new responses. Acknowledging this definition, Hartley⁷ argues that perception primarily consists in relating to what we are sensing and that in order to perceive clearly, our attention, concentration, motivation or desire must actively focus on what is there to be perceived. Thus this way of moving while paying attention to patterns and to interpretation of sensory information is, according to Hartley, compulsory in the establishment of a vivid and efficiently organised perception. In fact we do learn to move through exploration of the perceptual process. And we are able to feel areas that are active and through which movement can pass freely, overactive and overcharged places, and areas where there is a quality of inactivity. It is in these areas that we feel function to be inhibited through a lack of aliveness and awareness. Through moving with attention, awareness is driven into those places that are brought into our perception, into our self-definition. This is how the new response is acquired. If we are able to hold within our awareness the movement potential we are seeking to help set free, then we create a space within which the movement pattern might be embodied and experienced.

This moment of recognition may or may not be available to the conscious mind. It will most certainly be experienced as a change in organisation, attention, and perception as the pattern is discovered, or rediscovered, and new movement sensations are felt. The very first moment of recognition is the most significant one in the process of reorganisation. It is then the greatest learning within the neuromuscular system is taking place: a new connection is being made and a new alignment of mind and body is discovered. Once a new, more whole and efficient pattern has been experienced

⁶ Feldenkrais, M. 2005. Body and Mature Behaviour: A Study of Anxiety, Sex, Gravitation and Learning. North Atlantic Books

⁷ Hartley, L. 1995. Wisdom of the body moving: An introduction to Body-Mind Centring. North Atlantic Books

and recognized at some level of awareness, that pattern becomes potentially available to us. Instead of being stuck in a habitual or limited pattern of movement, perception, and behaviour, we now have a choice. The new pattern needs to be supported by further practice and refinement and nurtured by understanding, encouragement, and appreciation of the effort involved. The student will then be more and more able to make her/his own choice toward healthy functioning.

To sum up let us quote Todd:

"It is possible to bring the organic impressions and resulting movements into consciousness and thus to control the adjustments. This fact underlies the learning process and conditions any improvement.⁸"

From a personal point of view, I am very thankful for the improvement in self-awareness as it rendered me able to cope better with my knee injury. I am aware of how strongly my heel strikes the ground when I walk, through which positions my knee goes, when bending, trying not to skip amongst them, in order to avoid any sudden muscular contraction that could stress the joint and cause the pain. To be aware means to appropriately facilitate our intentions.

"Some people don't know what to wish for, while others know it. But there are a very small number of those who know how to reach it. Increase of awareness will help them to find a way out of confusion. The awareness brings the knowledge of what is necessary to do. By this it frees their energies for creative work.⁹"

⁸ Todd, M.E., 1980. *The Thinking Body*. Dance Books Limited

⁹ Feldenkrais, M. 1996. *Feldenkraisova metoda: Pohybem k sebeuvědomění* (Awareness Through Movement) Pragma

Efficiency

According to the Feldenkrais method's principles¹⁰, when action is efficient no energy is wasted. This means also that performing an action requires no unnecessary movement.

"Well-coordinated movement leads towards its efficiency and balanced skeletal alignment, for skeletal alignment and movement performance are completely interdependent. Improvement in the mechanical efficiency of either one automatically leads to improvement in the other."¹¹

In dance, everything is submitted to accomplishment of efficient movement, for its fluency and effortlessness. Once again Feldenkrais¹² argues that when the movement is efficient the body moves smoothly, and describes clear curves or lines. The aesthetic search for design and purity in movement is thus satisfied. In good action, the sensation of effort is absent no matter what the actual expenditure of energy is. The sensation of effort is the subjective feeling of wasted movement.

All inefficient action is accompanied by this sensation. When carefully analyzed, it is always possible to show convincingly that the sensation of effort is due to other actions being enacted besides the one intended.

People with proper body control do, in fact, carry themselves in such a way that no preliminary adjustments or movement necessary to pass from standing to walking or from walking to running. They can also reverse any undertaken movement at any time more easily than other people. All directions are accessible to their inspection while in locomotion without an intermediate preliminary adjustment. The sensation of effort can be identified through hardly perceptible breaks in the breathing rhythm, poor performances, halting of breath, kinks in the curvature of the spine and unnecessary fixation of joints in space. Trying to explore how to use less expenditure of energy necessary to perform an action is fundamental to the Feldenkrais practice as well as key to a dancer's improvement.

¹⁰ Feldenkrais, M. 1985. *The Potent Self: A study of Spontaneity and Compulsion*. North Atlantic Books.

¹¹ Sweigard, L.E.1988. *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Facilitation*. University Press of America

¹² Feldenkrais, M. 2005. *Body and Mature Behaviour: A study of Anxiety, Sex, Gravitation and Learning*. North Atlantic Books

If the muscles work under our conscious control, and if we succeed to increase our awareness to such a degree that we are able to fully recognise their effort, then we can distinguish such a muscular activity, which is useless and which have not been yet available to our awareness. The less effort that we make as we move the smaller are the differences that we can distinguish.

"We can voluntarily redirect our movement, but we cannot voluntarily impose controls on muscle coordination and hope to attain efficiency (...) Fortunately, there resides within the nervous system a good deal of innate wisdom which automatically chooses, if given the chance, the neuromuscular pathways best suited to accomplish desired movement (...) Dancers work so hard in a culture that prioritizes workouts to build muscle strength. By pushing, pulling, holding, and stretching the body and its parts, a certain norm in positions and movements is finally reached (...) It is reached, however, after unnecessary expenditure of energy. Although such a waste of energy can be tolerated in youth, the price paid for these excesses and the inefficient neuromuscular habits they build in the body will be exacted later in life (...) Such teaching methods are still present in a dance education, like methods giving a priority to achieve a goal at any costs, no matter how much energy is wasted (...) Although such a methods of education often produce the outward effect desired, they frequently build strain that can, in turn, lead to premature debilitation and actual loss of efficiency in movement.¹³"

Following Feldenkrais' logic¹⁴, if thinking, feeling and controlling organs do not cooperate permanently, fluently and purposely, the inappropriate muscles involved might be contradictory for the desired action. The time, attention and ability to discriminate are conditioned for learning. Discrimination is conditioned by sensory perception. To be able to learn we need to improve our senses. If we use only physical strength for this purpose, we would achieve a contradictory effect. We should detachedly observe what is happening with us, when learning something new. By doing this we can keep the mind clear, calm and observe our breathing without strain. Strain often has its origin in haste.

In the Feldenkrais Method the image of a pure skeleton is often mentioned, because it is mostly the tension present in muscles that causes the mobility to be restricted

¹³ Sweigard, L.E.1988. Human Movement Potential; Its Ideokinetic Facilitation. University Press of America

¹⁴ Feldenkrais, M. 1996. Feldenkraisova metoda: Pohybem k sebeuvědomění (Awareness Through Movement) Pragma

and effortful. Thinking about movement in terms of pure skeletal operation might make us discover the natural support of the bones, aligned in relation to gravity, carrying us through space without any strain. Then the relationship between our skeletal and muscular system can be clarified: when bones are there to support us, muscles are free to be used for what they are made: to move.

Complexity

“A human body is of a great complexity. It consists of about 60 000 billion cells which are forming the structure and base of every function. It is permanently in intensive activity.¹⁵”

“Even only the human brain consists of approximately one hundred billion neurons, that all together add up to a length of over three million kilometres. Every neuron has about ten thousand connections to other neurons. Therefore it is assumed that we have around a sextillion of such connections in the brain. Therefore the human brain is expected to be the most complex natural or artificial structure on earth (Green et al. 1998). The number of possible (on/off) states of the brain is astronomical: it is estimated to be one million to the power of 10. The nervous system is an organization of many highly specialized cells. The individual cell and the community of cell exist as separate entities and as one whole at the same moment.¹⁶”

“With its infinite branches forming a network throughout the body, the nervous system is constantly acting on all structures and organs, conveying impulses to and from the centres in the brain and spinal cord (...) Kinaesthetic sensation from extremely numerous and scattered nerve end-organs in highly innervated muscles, tendons, joints, ligaments, bones, cartilage, and other tissues of the supporting framework, make us aware of movement, weight pressure, and the relative positions of the parts of the body.¹⁷”

It is possible to access those parts through our attention and to use its qualities and potential to support our movement and to enrich our perception. When paying attention to the movement, one can notice an enormous amount of different sensations coming from the body, about which we can become aware of. Each new detail offering the potential to perceive oneself more fully in action. Our body has an incredible diversity of structures and functions, which we are not aware of.

¹⁵ The Human Body. Fortuna Print, 2003

¹⁶ Hartley, L. 1995. Wisdom of the body moving: An introduction to Body-Mind Centering. North Atlantic Books

¹⁷ Todd, M.E., 1980. The Thinking Body. Dance Books Limited

In his book *Awareness Through Movement* Feldenkrais¹⁸ points at that whatever we do, does not mean that we know what we are doing and how. A simple thing such as getting up of a chair remains a mystery, even when trying to consciously figure out what is happening. Do we first contract abdominal or posterior muscles? Do we first stretch our legs or bend the trunk? And what is going on with our eyes and head? What about our skin and tendons?

To achieve an ideal self-image would mean to be fully aware of every single part of our body including all the bones and the joints. The perfect image of oneself is a hardly attainable ideal¹⁹. Our skeleton for example consists of 206 bones. The mobile ones are constantly changing position and spatial relationship to each other even in stillness. Only the thoracic spine together with the rib joints count around 144 joints. No part of the body can be moved without all the others being affected. This means that even a simple step promptly activates an incredible amount of movements all over the body, an incredible amount of configurations and complex articulations in the skeletal system. How many constellations of bones are made during one step just in the foot, dozens or hundreds? Is it possible to feel them all? However the way towards this ideal already reveals amazing capacities of our perception, which makes us gradually discover how we act and how we are in the world. When learning to move/dance, we might tend to set only one way of doing a certain movement action. This way, which is proven and best facilitates our intention, this way we consider to be right, this way we can stick to and be secure, we always use it repeatedly as a pattern. The same might occur with the places of movement's initiation. We are familiar with impulses from the spine as well as from the limbs. But how far do we consider the complex structure of our bodies? Looking at the lungs, we can see that they are formed by 5 lobes – by 2 on the left side and by 3 on the right side. They are fully three dimensional. This means, that there are much more possibilities of breathing than only one. We can breathe only to lower parts, or back parts, or just to

¹⁸ Feldenkrais, M. 1996. *Feldenkraisova metoda: Pohybem k sebeuvědomění* (Awareness Through Movement) Pragma

¹⁹ Feldenkrais, M. 1996. *Feldenkraisova metoda: Pohybem k sebeuvědomění* (Awareness Through Movement) Pragma

one of the lobes on the left side etc. And what about initiations of movement? Have we ever tried to initiate movement from the upper part of the sternum or from the back part of the sixth rib, or the ninth vertebrae? Through the Feldenkrais method we are getting to know more about our bodies and because it is so complex in its anatomy and function there is always more to discover, especially when really paying attention to the details, sometimes even to the micro details.

“Every simple movement is complex in both execution and accompanying sensations.²⁰”

Malcolm Manning, Feldenkrais practitioner and somatic teacher, based in Finland

We ignore most sensations and mobility potentials when we try to always be correct according to our image of correctness and perfection. The complexity of the nervous system is so great, that a considerable amount of unwanted, unnecessary, and quite often detrimental activity is produced. Despite this, there are still tendencies to be frustrated from being “wrong” according to the image assertion, which does not accept the body as something complex, asymmetrical, irregular, liable to outer circumstances, intelligent and continuously dealing with its infinitely diverse self-organisation process. The question is not what is correct, but what is really there.

“We are not looking to get it right, or be perfect, but opening up a dialogue with the sensation.²¹”

²⁰ Manning. M., 2009. Awareness Perception Presence: Inquiring into forming a body of work

²¹ Manning. M., 2009. Awareness Perception Presence: Inquiring into forming a body of work

Individuality

ATM classes are based on individual self-exploration through movement. By doing so, the student has the opportunity to focus and reflect on her own mechanics, limitations and her own feelings about various kinds of movement. He/she gradually builds up a strong interrelationship between movement and the body as a container of sensations, thoughts and feelings. Such an attitude towards learning respects the feedback from one's entire personality across thinking, sensing, feeling and moving. Balancing those aspects maintain our improvement harmonious.

Harmonious improvement is not as simple as it might seem, especially in society that requires specialization in a limited range of activities for long periods. Feldenkrais claims that for example, abstract thinking is often associated with advantages only. The development of abstract thinking occupies in science and in all social activities the most significant position. But at the same time language and abstraction becomes a power that detaches the human being from a sudden reality, which is subsequent to disturbance of harmony in all-human activity. The more we are busy only with abstraction, the more distant we are to our thinking, sensing, feeling and even to our own movement. Abstract thinking separated from deep inner sources (feelings, emotions, sensations), becomes a factory on empty words. Thinking, which does not go along with other aspects of human life, becomes subversive to its own growth.

Feldenkrais continues that on the other hand, strong feelings are distracting to factual and unprejudiced mind. To make our thinking expedient, it is necessary to keep it clear, unaffected by our feelings or by subjective prepossessions.

Finally, who uses muscles without trying to understand what exactly is going on, acts as a machine. The value in such movements is just in its mechanical execution. Mechanical repetition only increases a blood circulation and activates muscle's work. It is impossible to accept an outer stimulation -for example a dance phrase- as an integral component of our entity, without taking sufficient time to understand it with awareness and attention.

"We improve our well-being when we learn to fully use ourselves"²²

²² <http://www.feldenkrais.com> 25.07.10

Feldenkrais

While learning to dance, many other problems can occur by overstraining or neglecting one of those aspects.

For example: when we do not observe nor communicate our thoughts or feelings it can lead to confusion, narrowness or indifference of the mind.

"To find a proper balance between moving, thinking, sensing and feeling is even harder in social environment where conflict between our social motivations and our personal desires is emerged. Each individual is unique with his/her anatomy, appearance and acting. Despite to all differences, the adjustment to the society requires us to be as similar as possible to the others. The society set the way we should be dressed, abolishing the uniqueness of our appearance. No matter how different we are, they teach us to speak and to represent ourselves in the same way, receive their criteria, values and patterns of behaviour in order to direct our self-education the way they want. The indoctrinated moral values create a uniformity of obedience, in which our individual differences fade away. Individuals are forced to suppress the spontaneous needs and wishes to adjust to the values of the society. This results in reality where most people are hidden under the mask. The mask represents the face they would wish to have in front of other people and themselves. In order to not reveal their organic specialities, they strictly criticise their own inner intentions and spontaneous needs. It is not unusual for us to sacrifice our organic identity to preserve the social image, we have formed from ourselves.²³"

The Feldenkrais Method helps the students to discover their needs and to overcome their fear to react according to them. When following Feldenkrais²⁴ once more, we can write: not all individuals are aware of their innate originality and respect its consequential needs. Many people are alienated from their natural needs, trying to sometimes violently possess places instructed by society. If they do not succeed in their effort, they feel of little value, they feel unsure and uprooted in their further activities.

Our intelligence depends upon the opportunity we take to experience and learn on our own; this self-learning leads to full dynamic living.

²³ Feldenkrais, M. 1996. Feldenkraisova metoda: Pohybem k sebeuvědomění (Awareness Through Movement) Pragma

²⁴ Feldenkrais, M. 1996. Feldenkraisova metoda: Pohybem k sebeuvědomění (Awareness Through Movement) Pragma

*The object of this learning is to remove outside authority from your inner life.*²⁵"

Feldenkrais

Each individual, who wants to attempt further natural growth and full development of his/her given skills is under an intensive pressure.

Jozef Fruček is a Slovak dancer, actor, teacher and choreographer, whom I have met in Prague few years ago on his workshop. In his article called: *Introduction to the mechanism of injury* he writes:

*We are not the same, but we tend to forget that. We like to compare. That brings a lot of stress and misunderstanding. To feel that you would like to be better is good motivation, but it would be better if it comes from your internal wish, not from the motivation of comparison with someone else, otherwise we will be full of tension, frustration and injuries. To get inspired, absorb images and information from outside, to improve yourself is very good and important, but you should still stay yourself and see how you can fit these things in. If you see a bird flying, you don't try to fly, you do not copy it. You are not a bird, but you absorb the essence of it, the lightness and space of flying. You reach out to take risks and to discover new things, but at the same time you come back to your center, to retreat, to listen to yourself. These are two basic evolutionary movements.*²⁶

²⁵ <http://www.feldenkrais.com> 25.07.10

²⁶ <http://www.artyci.com/> Introduction to the Mechanism Of Injury by J.Fruček 26.10.10

Curiosity and Motivation

“The beginner’s mind contains many possibilities, the mind of an expert contains few of them. The beginner’s mind is open to everything.”²⁷

S. Suzuki

Curiosity is an emotion related to natural inquisitive behaviour such as exploration, investigation and learning, which is evident by observation in human and many animal species. Curiosity opens up a field for new experiences and subsequent changes. How to find a motivation for improving the way we move? How to be curious about our improvement? What do we imagine under the term “improvement”? Is it something that always needs a lot of effort? Does improvement necessarily mean to acquire incredible speed, or to manage acrobatics, or to rotate longer? Experienced dancers might feel discouraged by their own image of improvement, because improvement is usually associated with extremely hard work.

“We are taught that trying hard is a virtue in life, and we are misled into believing that trying hard is virtue to learning.”²⁸

“Improvement in the Feldenkrais Method is perceived in many layers. It concerns itself with learning. More specifically, learning how to learn.”²⁹

The Feldenkrais Method employs a pedagogical process that applies not only to learning new movements, but also to any new skill. It helps to find the inner source of creativity, as well as ways of working with pain or of accessing pleasure through movement. People report results of increased vitality, enhancement of self-image, better breathing and posture, greater flexibility and range of motion, or reduction of pain. Feldenkrais³⁰ teaches us that improvement can be achieved in an easier and more playful way than we may have thought in the first. It is an example of creative learning, which is rarely present in artistic education programs. The method renders

²⁷ Suzuki, S. 1994. Zenová Mysl Záctecnika, Pragma

²⁸ Feldenkrais, M. 1975. Learn to Learn. Feldenkrais Educational Foundation of North America

²⁹ Manning, M., 2009. Awareness Perception Presence: Inquiring into forming a body of work

³⁰ Feldenkrais, M. 1996. Feldenkraisova metoda: Pohybem k sebeuvědomění (Awareness Through Movement) Pragma

us curious about our own functioning, about this undiscovered intelligence of the body, its mechanisms of learning and its ability to learn. We are used to employ only a few percents of our actual capacities. It is because we usually stop learning once we have achieved the level of knowledge and skill that helps us to reach our primary goals. For example we improve our language only until we can understand it. Who would like to speak clearly as an actor, realises that there is still work for a few more years in order to at least approach the boundaries of this linguistic capability. It means that we voluntarily use our capacity only partly, because it is enough to reach our goals. We are not aware that by doing so we voluntarily hold back our own improvement. Ordinarily we learn just enough to function. We learn to use our hands well enough to eat, our legs well enough to walk. Our abilities to function with a greater range of ease and skill however, remain to be developed. As dancers, once we seemingly overmaster a certain movement vocabulary, we might come to the feeling that something is achieved and that there is no longer a reason to question it. Our dance can therefore become schematic and mechanical. Did you ever ask yourself the following question: does the way I move or the technique I do enrich me? Do the movements you do enhance your health, your intellect, knowledge or feeling of harmony? Do they inspire you in any way?

The Feldenkrais Method links together curiosity, motivation and creativity. Most of our lives are constructed around knowing. But my experience is that knowing can be also a trap because the kind of knowledge we want to posses can become confined and uncommunicative to other solutions, which the body-mind suggests at the present moment. Exercising with the Feldenkrais method always brings back the fact that there are always more solutions to the same task than initially preconceived and that even a solution, which worked yesterday, might not work today due to our constantly changing anatomy and sensations. When learning with the Feldenkrais method, we often shift our attention between known and unknown. To remain curious and open to new sensations within the same structure as we sometimes repeat a particular exercise every day, for example rolling down, allows us to discover something new and also to motivate our selves. Even a simple rolling down can be an exciting journey when allowing the mind to be creative within the well-known form and to be generous towards the occurred changes.

All our life we learn and adapt to new circumstances. It is an on going process without end. Of course we form our opinions by experiencing the world. We use that knowledge to fix a structure; we build up certain habits which were experienced and proved in daily actions. But we should be able to rewrite them again and again. We should stay flexible. If we are proud of what we know and we stick to certain opinions without the possibility of change, we are calling for injury. Everything moves; do not hold on too tight in to anything; it might harm you³¹.

When we are being creative, we don't know what is going to happen next. In many Feldenkrais lessons, we don't know what will be the next step and where we are going to end up. We have the chance to surprise and observe ourselves in this unusual context.

"It's not that we are explicitly teaching creativity, but we are evoking a greater sense of choice in how we can sense, feel, think, and move, while eliciting your innate curiosity"³².

An experienced dancer is usually going to move with many expectations. These expectations already predetermine a kind of acting related to what they are. Having no expectations, all the possibilities are still open.

³¹ <http://www.artyci.com/> Introduction to the Mechanism Of Injury by J.Fruček 26.10.10

³² <http://www.feldenkrais.com> 25.07.10

Part Two

ATM (Awareness Through Movement) lesson

In this chapter I describe a part of one ATM lesson. It is a lesson called: ***twisting and opposing gently***. It is a transcription of the class instructed by Falk Feddersen.³³ I analysed some of the instructions using ideas that I found in the books of Moshe Feldenkrais. Moreover I quote certified Feldenkrais Practitioner Malcolm Manning explaining some of the ATM sections as well as other teachers who have written about their work. Most of the instructions and the analytical terms refer to the key concepts that have been introduced in previous chapters. This chapter serves as an example of how the ideas might be applied in the Feldenkrais practice.

The lesson's transcript will be in *italic*, the meta-comments in normal letters and indented.

At the beginning students usually lie with their backs on the mat and listen to the instructions given by the teacher/practitioner

Teacher: *Lie on your backs comfortably. Take a moment to scan yourself, to track what you feel, your sensations. Where does your attention go? Does it stay in one place, or does it travel inside your body, outside your body? Can you sense your contact with the ground? The imprint you make with the floor under you?*

Normally in an hour-long class there are 5-10 minutes at the beginning resting on the floor and scanning oneself for sensation. This operates as a reference point so that one can notice any change before and after. In between particular instructions, there is always a little pause kept for the participants to answer the questions for themselves.

Teacher: *I'd like to start with the pelvis, sensing whether the right side or the left side of the pelvis is making more or less contact with the floor? You can also sense your*

¹http://openatm.org/atm/falkfeddersen/falk_ATM_mar08_2010.mp3 04.08.10

legs. Is one leg heavier into the floor than the other? Is the rotation of one leg a little bit more turned out than the other? Perhaps one leg seems longer to you. Does what you sense in the pelvis make sense of what you sense in your legs? Let's say, if the left side of your pelvis were making more contact with the floor, would your left leg feel more turned out?

Teacher: *In ATM we use the contrast and asking what are the differences, to help to create the changes.*

Manning: After a Feldenkrais ATM class, in common with many somatic explorations, a change is often felt. This change is variously perceived as a shift in alignment (the way the body is organising in gravity), or feeling heavier or lighter, or just feeling different. This simple feeling of difference is perhaps the most interesting since it could refer to a shift in how one moves (movement feels different), physical sensation (the body feels different), the way one feels, one is thinking (a change in the quality of decision making processes), or the emotions (feeling emotions differently). More often than not, it is experienced as all of these things together. Simply a way of being that feels different. Sometimes we don't quite feel like ourselves, or in extreme cases, we feel like someone else. After the experience that led to this feeling is over, the feeling of change diminishes to the point when one feels back to normal again. This prompts two questions. What happens to this change? And more interesting and often challenging still, how can we bring any pleasing feelings of change into our lives, both professionally and generally? How can we make use of this change?³⁴

Teacher: *You can also sense your spine and rib cage. When you take a breath, full breath, does it seem like it comes more into the upper part of your rib cage or more the lower part of your ribs? Sense how your head is lying and the orientation of your head. What would be the distance between chin to the top of your chest, to the top of your sternum? If on the tip of your nose were a laser pointer and were shooting up to the ceiling, would it go straight up or would it go to the left or to the right? If you'd have to roll, to the left or to the right really quickly, which way are you already*

³⁴ Manning, M., 2009. Awareness Perception Presence: Inquiring into forming a body of work

preferentially rolling? Are your shoulders and your pelvis and your rib cage and your head all a little bit aligned in one direction, either to the left or to the right?

Teacher: *Roll your head gently to the left and to the right.*

Feldenkrais: "The less effort that we make as we move, the smaller the differences that we can distinguish. The lighter the effort we make, the faster is our learning of any skill...**We stop improving when we sense no difference in the effort made.** We sense differences and select the good from useless: that is, we differentiate."³⁵

Teacher: *Feel the quality of the movement. So, it is not just how far you can go comfortably to the left and to the right although that is very important, it is also how lubricated, how fluid motion is, just five or ten degrees off centre.*

Feldenkrais: "By not going to the limit of your ability while learning, the focus stays on the process and not the end result. Also, by stopping before you reach your limit, you are aware that it could always be possible to do more and are therefore encouraged to continue to learn. By avoiding the stress of approaching your limit, what you do remains pleasurable. Another incentive to persist with the learning."³⁶

Teacher: *Leave that and pause.*

Manning: "As soon as a movement becomes tiring, mechanical or simply boring then stop and have a rest – in the Method its not often the movements that are tiring but the act of paying attention while moving – there is nothing to be gained in the method from repeating movement mindlessly – **its all about moving mindfully** – likewise if a rest is called but you are deeply interested in

³⁵ Feldenkrais, M. 1975. Learn to Learn. Feldenkrais Educational Foundation of North America

³⁶ Feldenkrais, M. 1975. Learn to Learn. Feldenkrais Educational Foundation of North America

something then continue – the idea is that the spoken instructions are a guide to an exploration of an idea rather than orders to be followed.”³⁷

Teacher: *So, now let's roll on to our right side, bring the knees up in about a 90 degree angle and now I want you to turn with your head and look towards the ceiling with your face. And place your left hand on your forehead. So this is going to be one of the basic positions. So, your left palm is on your forehead and your left elbow is pointed up towards the ceiling. So your face, your elbow and your hand are all aligned. Turn your elbow and your face a little further to the left and come back to the centre. Feel, how you do this movement in the middle of your back. Feel, how your pelvis will begin to respond. If you went further eventually, you pull your left knee. Your left knee would start to come away from your right knee.*

Feldenkrais: Do not try to do “nicely” “An act becomes nice when we do nothing but the act. Everything we do over and above that, or short of it, destroys harmony.”³⁸ He suggests that we focus on doing the action simply as possibly.

Teacher: *Pause with your left elbow facing up to the ceiling. And now, stand your left foot. So now your left knee is also facing to the ceiling. Your right leg is out to the right, it is out to the side and your face, your left elbow and your left knee is pointed towards the ceiling.*

And so now, in equal measure, take your left elbow and your left knee to the right and then to the left, but do it in a way, that if you take your knee to the left in 30 degree than you also take your elbow 30 degree to the left, so they are in a line within each other, always. Nice, slow and gentle movements.

Feldenkrais: “Do everything very slowly. I do not intend to teach you, but to enable you to learn at your own rate of understanding and doing. Time is the most important means of learning... No one can learn when hurried and hustled.”³⁹

³⁷ Manning. M., 2009. Awareness Perception Presence: Inquiring into forming a body of work

³⁸ Feldenkrais, M. 1975. Learn to Learn. Feldenkrais Educational Foundation of North America

³⁹ Feldenkrais, M. 1975. Learn to Learn. Feldenkrais Educational Foundation of North America

Teacher: *And what you might feel, when you do this, is that it's not just your knee and your elbow moving, it's your entire torso rolling in certain amount. And leave that, lie on your back, let your legs go long...*



Teacher: *Ok, let's roll over onto your right side again. Look with the face up to the ceiling. Put the left hand on to the forehead and stand the left foot, so that the knee is also pointed towards the ceiling. Now, in this position, you don't want to be all the way over on your back. You still want to maintain, have a little bit of the sense that you are also on the side as well, so that your right knee is comfortable on the floor. So now, take your left elbow a little bit further to the left and bring it back to the centre (we are repeating this movement a couple of times), but now leave the knee in place. So before we are moving the elbow and the knee together, now the knee is staying in place. Continue rolling with your elbow to the left and come back to the centre. Feel, what has to happen in the middle of you, in the middle of your back, in the middle of your chest, in order to create this movement.*

Every movement has its consequence somewhere in the body. This is how we learn not only to pay attention towards the active, leading part, but also to the

part that supports this activation, which makes the activation possible. In dance for example, we often forget about our knees when moving the arms, but it is actually the knees that make the arm flow free. Paying attention to those consequential parts makes us understand that the body always moves as a whole. It is like a complex chain of actions and reactions.

Teacher: *Now pause with your elbow pointed up to the ceiling. And now, continue bringing the elbow to the left, but now, bring your knee to the right. So the knee and the arm would be going to the opposite direction. And come back to the centre, always to the centre, and take the knee to the right while the elbow goes to the left. Your back and your chest have to move, they have to... A twist has to occur there. The chest and the ribs have to soften in order to make a nice, fluid movement.*

Feldenkrais: "Do not concentrate if concentrating means to you directing your attention to one particular important point to the utmost of your ability. Do not concentrate but, rather, attend well to the entire situation, your body and your surroundings by scanning the whole sufficiently to become aware of any change or difference, concentrating just enough to perceive it."⁴⁰

Teacher: *And remember, don't bring it to the stretch, just really think about the movement and generating it, paying attention to the middle of you as you do this.*

Pullen: "Stretching actually excites the nervous system to shorten the muscle and act against what you want to be doing. You can actually lose rather than gain flexibility. That's a physiological fact. But the psychological fact is that you feel that you're not good enough to do what you are doing or that you can only get good enough with pain. 'No pain, no gain.' That's unnecessary. We know that. That's a fact."⁴¹

Teacher: *Beautiful. Leave this alone and rest on your back. Legs long, arms long. And sense now the differences between the left and right side.*

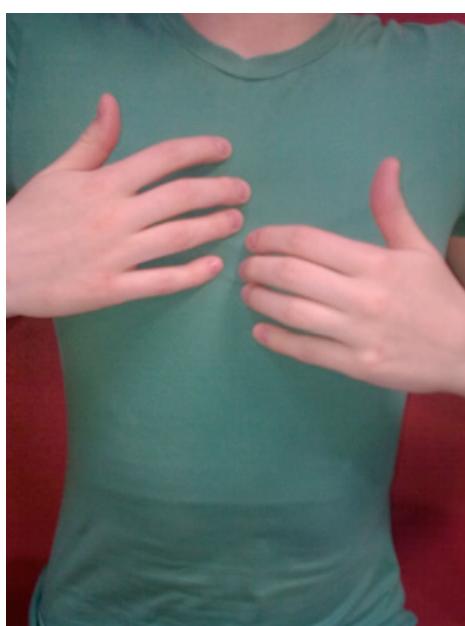
⁴⁰ Feldenkrais, M. 1975. Learn to Learn. Feldenkrais Educational Foundation of North America

⁴¹ http://www.feldenkrais.com/method/article/what_would_moshe_do_sa_spring_2009/ by Gabrielle Pullen, 06.08.10

Manning: After standing up at the end of a one-sided Feldenkrais ATM class, I felt like the world on one side of me was huge and limitless while the world on the other side of me was much smaller and limited. When one participant who I hardly noticed at the beginning of the class stood up at the end, she appeared to me to take up much more space than anyone else in the room. Checking with her afterwards, she reported a shift in the way her shoulders were organised, and also a new and unfamiliar feeling of awareness of what was behind and above her.⁴²

Teacher: *As we have been working just on one side, is there change in orientation of the pelvis or in the rib cage or your shoulders and your head? Now, when we have been moving just the left side, is there something becoming a little bit more aware in the centre of you, in the solar plexus or in the middle of your spine?*

Teacher: *Place your fingers on the base of the solar plexus. The solar plexus is located at the bottom of the sternum. And then, with your fingers palpate the ribs, feel the bottom of the ribs as they go out to the side. And come back to the middle. And palpate with your fingers also up the sternum.*



⁴² Manning, M., 2009. Awareness Perception Presence: Inquiring into forming a body of work

Sascha Krausneker is a Feldenkrais Practitioner, based in Vienna. I have asked him to add here a comment on the phenomenon of touch and its role in the Feldenkrais method practice. He explains:

In some lessons it is useful to include the sensation and sense of touch to the process of becoming more aware. The touch can be used like a highlighting pen or marker that highlights a certain part. We are at the same time the person who gives touch and the one that is touched. This creates a great feedback for our own system: we sense ourselves from the inside and the outside at the same time. We therefore gain a maximum of sensory information about a specific part and also how this part behaves in relation to the whole self. Touching ourselves while paying attention to the sensation of it can be a great tool for increasing our self-awareness.

When lying down on the floor we can observe a similar phenomenon. We touch the floor and create an imprint. This imprint is as individual as a fingerprint. An inward scanning of this imprint is often done in the beginning of a lesson. It helps us to identify how certain parts feel in relation to our structure, to gravity and to the floor. A lot of sensory information can be perceived from this scan: The weight, the pressure and the sensation of a single part or of our entire self can be observed. This helps us to sense differences, for example on the two sides of our self. Also we are now able to compare the *status quo* to some time later in the lesson or in the future. There is no way to notice any change if we are not able to sense (sometimes small) differences. To be able to sense and perceive differences is the basis of all learning.

Teacher: *Just feel how the sternum is bent. This cartilage is bent, one inch and a half wide, and it goes from the solar plexus all the way up to the clavicles. This cartilage is flexible, it can bend, it can twist it can slide. Leave it let your hands go along.*

Malcolm Manning, a Feldenkrais Practitioner with whom I've had the pleasure to study used to say that the resting between exercises is like being a painter who is taking a break to look at his picture. He would add: "How can you know what you are painting if you never look at it?"

Teacher: *Let's roll over again on to the right side. Let's get into that same position. So, we were looking with the face to the ceiling, the left elbow is on the forehead and the left knee is standing. So the last movement that we did is that we took the elbow to the left while we took the left knee to the right. So lets now do the opposite movement, let's take the elbow to the right while we take the knee to the left. And then bring it back to the centre. And feel how the lower part of your sternum and your rib cage respond to this movement. Can you do it in such a way so that whatever arc you make with the elbow you make the identical arc with the knee?*

In ATM we find some unusual solutions to the idea of limitations. During an ATM we might purposely restrict movement in one area so that we literally have to move somewhere else. We call these “constraints.” Using these constraints, we open up possibilities in movement that we were previously unaware of.

Teacher: *So, if you go 30 degrees over with your elbow, your knee goes 30 degrees in the opposite direction. All the time when you are doing this you continue to feel and sense what is happening in your rib cage, in your sternum. Can you feel your sternum sliding and bending as you do this? Pause, rest on your back and sense the changes of how you are lying on the floor now. Is there a difference in how the legs are lying on the floor? Is there a difference in your breathing?*

Teacher: *Ok, let's lie on the other side. So, we are going to lie on the left side now. Have the knees on top of each other. Direct the face towards the ceiling and put the right hand on top of the forehead, in the same position. Your left arm can be just somewhere comfortable, wherever you like it to be. And now in this position, take your right elbow and bring it further to the right. Turn to the right and just sense, how you do this.*

Feldenkrais: “I’m not interested in the movements themselves, but how you do them.”⁴³

Teacher: *So bring it gently to the right and to the middle.*

⁴³ Feldenkrais, M. 1975. Learn to Learn. Feldenkrais Educational Foundation of North America



Webber: Whenever we act or exercise with unnecessary effort, we force our neuromuscular system to organize defensively in order to protect us from potential danger and damage. In this way, over the course of our lives, we build up conflicting patterns of anxiety and strain throughout our body and mind, patterns that become habitual and unconscious. Try as we might, we cannot release this strain by force of will. We know for ourselves that with habits we want to change, the more we try to resist or change the habit, the less effective we feel and the stronger the habit becomes. We don't know why, but somehow we feel tangled up in knots.⁴⁴

Feldenkrais: “The effort to succeed interferes with accomplishing our goals.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ from the article “Seeing Clearly”, by Feldenkrais Practitioner David Webber, www.feldenkrais.com, accessed on June 2010)

⁴⁵ Feldenkrais, M. 1985. The Potent Self: A study of Spontaneity and Compulsion. North Atlantic Books.

Teacher: *And feel how is your rib cage's response, your sternum's response and your abdominal response...*

In an ATM class, we learn to use many kinds of possibilities to accomplish movement in an easier way. Those choices very much vary depended on each individual. We learn that there are more ways of doing the same movement sequence, so that we can choose which is the best for us. We are invited to play and experiment around the mobility in the joints, to negotiate within our body and whole self the possible solutions to attain comfort. We are asked to extend our choices in terms of initiations as well as reactions.

"The exercises are so simple and so ingenious, and they themselves lead on to others which one can invent in the same style."

Yehudi Menuhin

Here, I am finishing this chapter with the words of Feldenkrais Practitioner Sharon Starika

"Just continue a few more movements for yourself, because it's all about your self anyways, nobody else can do this for you, but you."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ www.openatm.org

Part Three

Conversation with Georg Blaschke about the application of the Feldenkrais Method to choreography, movement research and performance

This chapter is inquiring into the connection between the Feldenkrais Method and choreography, performance and movement research. This investigation is made in the form of interview of Vienna based choreographer, dancer and teacher Georg Blaschke. Georg first introduced me to the Feldenkrais Method as a tool to approach and investigate the connection between body and mind during the making process of two pieces of his in which I performed, *Jetzt Bist Du Dran.* (2008) and *In Case Of Loss.* (2010). Both works were premiered in Vienna.

Therefore I experienced somehow directly the way he researches and questions the intertwining of the method with his creative practice and this, from the very beginning of the process, going through the preparation of the body and the establishment of a methodology to devise choreographic material, until the final performance of the work. How does he perceive the method in relation to the process of choreographing and performing? His article "*A possible „somatic“ approach to a Performance and Research Practice*" also inspired my questions. It was written as an introduction of his work process to the contemporary dance students of the Konservatorium Wien Privatuniversität.

This interview was recorded on Saturday the 5th of September 2010.

How long have you been practicing the Feldenkrais Method?

I have been practicing Feldenkrais since 2004, so no longer than six years altogether. I had had a first experience of it 17 years ago, but it did not provoke in me much enthusiasm then. I seriously began to get into it when my Feldenkrais partner Sascha Krausneker was studying to become a certified Practitioner. Through him I have started to practice more continuously.

How does the Feldenkrais Method influence the way you create your choreographies?

First of all, it is a simple method, which prepares my body. It helps me to balance the challenges of being a dancer and performer throughout the aging process. So the Feldenkrais Method for me is primarily an approach aimed at my own benefit, my own well-being. At the beginning, my collaboration with Sascha was based on exploring the potential interrelationship between dance and the Feldenkrais Method, there was no real artistic intention *per se*, all that developed progressively over time. We initially were interested in finding out about the possible complex applications that this method may have. In the last couple of years, there have been many different ways in which I was able to apply it. At first it was not so direct; the connection was not as close as it is now. In practice, this means that the performers with whom I worked and myself, took the ATM classes as a preparation for the body, after which we were able to approach tasks that were given by me during the artistic process with more ease and openness. Nowadays the connection between the Feldenkrais Method and how I work with performers and also students is more direct. I really feel the straightforward implications that the method has in the artistic and aesthetic outcome.

On the one hand, what I have been researching a lot and what I have been trying out in my projects is to extend the essential elements of the method such as self-awareness, organisation of the skeleton, mobility, articulation etc. In order to extend these somewhat basic terms, we would connect with the Feldenkrais Method and consecutively ask the performers to go towards a format of representation in space. I am also very interested in how performers enter into contact with one another. The Feldenkrais Method is not only a method aiming at working by your self. It is also a method provoking or motivating contact with other people, not only through the hands, but also through the whole body and through the space and through the ground. All the implications of a moving structure in gravity, negotiating with a surface or with another moving structure really are connected to the method and have an artistic and aesthetic importance to me. I am still researching a lot about this. Recently the partnering issue in dance has become increasingly important to me. How to get in contact with each other as articulated bodies? So I work a lot with the possible influence of the Feldenkrais Method on physical contact, on partnering, on lifting, as well as on rather elaborate complex partner constellations and on the manner in which these are placed in space. On the other hand there is the choreographic issue. Here one could speak generally about this so-called *somatic*

approach, we all know that it is a rather vague term, but I use it. It is in a way a common term within certain realms of actual dance practises. Of course there are a few other somatic approaches and traditions, but I mainly practice the Feldenkrais Method beside Body Mind Centering or certain release techniques as they offer approaches that to my opinion come from the inside to the outside. The inner awareness is the main starting point for observing the organisation and the efficiency of movement, in other terms the effortlessness of movement. This “from the inside to the outside” process approached through improvisation or through a group process in space, provokes patterns. For me these are choreographic patterns that occur in a sense as a consequence, as a result because of the traces that bodies have left in space and time.

How would it work the other way around? I mean from the outside to the inside. What would be the difference?

I do not have an answer to this question... However the difference could be, that you would rather start by -I would not say copying- but by learning forms that are given through a certain dance language, or by studying choreography that is given already by its notation. And this would be for me the other end of the spectrum: that you would like to take in something more from the outside. Learning or taking from -which I am not against-, is another approach. However I feel strongly drawn into structuring choreography that prerequisites an inside awareness as a starting point or perhaps a concern in the structure, articulation and in the choreography within one's own body.

What is for you fascinating about the Feldenkrais Method?

Everything I have said until now. What is fascinating about it, is that the Feldenkrais Method is not about movement itself as far as I know it. I consider myself to be a student. I am not a Feldenkrais Practitioner, in fact I have never had a formal education, so strictly speaking I practice it as a curious learner and as an interested artist. The fascinating thing is that it is a method from which can be drawn general principles about learning processes. As a matter of fact it extends also into life itself because the comprehensiveness of its fundamentals is such that it can have a great number of applications, which do not have to be exclusively focused on the body, or on art practice or on whatever... It can be applied broadly in different ways: on human behaviour, on human evolution, on the animal evolution... This establishes a

system, which remains always open. It is not a system with fixed rules. Feldenkrais Practitioners always say that there are no exercises. There is not really something one should rehearse and exercise. It is much more about self-awareness. The method, I think could be used rather like a fundament for other movement and dance techniques. It is for me a tool that can be used in order to develop technique, and that is quite fascinating.



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In “A possible „somatic“ approach to a Performance and Research Practice“ you wrote: The point of stillness after complexity, which has been gone through...

What exactly do you mean by the term “complexity“?

So first of all I am interested in the stillness of movement and in what it could mean... What echo or resonance can the body have when it moves and comes to stillness? This interests me. This is why I would say that I am interested in movement, but also in the moment when movement ends and why and how it ends. The question I have, concerns the decipherment of movements, of systems or of complex combinations of

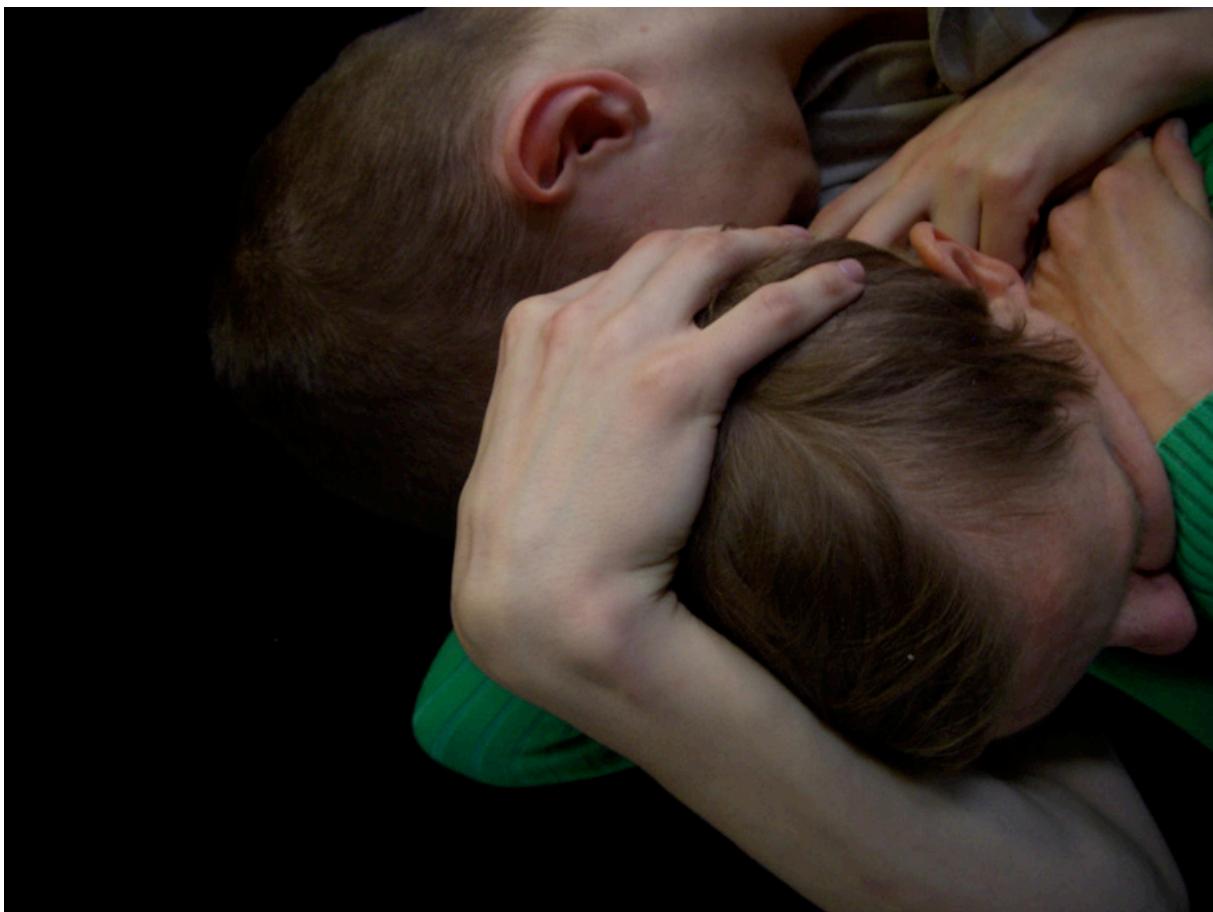
movements, which have actually been carried through until the point where stillness has been reached. It is interesting to me to observe, but also to experience processes and their complexity. To my eyes every movement is complex. It is sometimes enough to observe how the articulation of a little finger can have a high impact on the rest of the body. As we notice it from the practice of the Feldenkrais Method, everything is connected. It can have a really deep and very complex resonance in the entire anatomical architecture of the body that would be visible from the outside. As I look at it with a choreographer's eye, movement itself might appear simple but can have a very complex implication or context. Through this approach I feel especially when it comes to partnering, that the mind and the understanding of the self, of a performer's shifts, or of a system extended to two or more bodies is highly complex. It gets then even more complex. The connection between the mind and the body that we are talking about here engenders a special kind of presence. I would say this: it is complex but not complicated. "Complex" is for me a much richer word. I feel as an observer, when I hear the leaves, I can absorb and also enjoy a complex situation of life. Moving in space includes sound, light, smell etc... If sometimes there is stillness it has a resonance, a recollection of what took place previously. And then I can more accurately understand, in a deeper sense the complexity of it. There lies for me the connection to the stillness once again. If movement was only going on and on and on without interruption, maybe I would not be able to worship the moment when a complex situation comes up.

How does the Feldenkrais Method influence the way you are performing?

As I said in the beginning, I practice for myself and for my body, for my own understanding and my own awareness of myself, Georg, throughout the years. It has become a method or a tool to integrate the body in its own process of aging, of going through pain, of recovering from pain, of coping with stress and with my motivations to do something new. It is also for me a tool to integrate what we are doing as dancers, for example stretching, extending joints and all the things we have been training... So I want to integrate those memories and re-new them or re-define them as a personal equipment in my own life. It helped me a lot to stay flexible and also to keep regenerating and being interested in exploring new movements, in reinvesting myself in dance over and over.

What is the connection between the Feldenkrais Method and the act of performing in itself for you? I mean, what happens on stage, in front of the people? What is happening inside...?

The main issue concerns presence. When we embrace more bodily the general question of performing, this topic of presence rejoins the truly big issue tied to the core of Feldenkrais. It influenced me in this way, I would say... I like to approach the possibility of an open presence where the mind can shift from the inside to the outside and invites both states. It does not exclude anything. This is also considerably connected with vision and listening. You can listen and look inwardly, you can listen and watch outwardly and this concerns the space that surrounds you, the partners with whom you perform and also the audience members. The outside space becomes potentially a half-transparent space. To play with the states of awareness, to notice where the eyes wander, to invite your presence to perceive and to accept as well as to give back is for me what the Feldenkrais Method essentially is in relation to dance and performance.



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How do you understand the term “Efficient Movement”?

I would say, when the muscular effort is as little as necessary. Movement is efficient when the skeleton is used properly, in a connected way in order to articulate, also to stabilize the posture, and when this connectedness and alignment can successfully be maintained in complex situations including lifts, partnering work and more dynamic phrases. It includes the importance of understanding of how the effect of gravity through the skeleton is being noticed and balanced. I think, it is about awareness, because right now I do not know any rules that could define what an efficient movement is or is not. I would say that moving as much as possible free in the context of your own body and of the reality of your own limits is efficiency. This is also a very important idea coming from the Feldenkrais Method into the dance, this notion about constraint or restriction of movement. We have always some limitations. We have the limitation gravity implies, and therefore we have the limitations of space and architecture. We have our own joints and constraints given by them referring to the articulation of our gestures. When I was younger, I confronted these boundaries with willpower and discipline in order to overcome them, to engage the will to be stronger or better in the process. Now, through the method, through the application of pleasure, comfort and effortlessness, I have learned a lot about how to approach effortlessness and efficiency. More importantly how do I practice it with people, students, colleagues? Why should we lose the notion of pleasure along the way?

Is there, according to you, something like an “Efficient Mind”?

Maybe when you synchronize it with the body, it might be efficient ...

In the context of the body, it is clear when we say that we do not need to exceedingly tense our muscles, but what does efficiency mean in the context of the mind? What is unnecessary for the mind while we are moving/dancing?

This is a good question. For me the mind and body are not - it is also a spiritual question maybe - disconnected from each other. I believe that if the mind allows the body to be efficient then it understates that the mind is already efficient too. The method operates through the means of worldly suggestions. This method does not show movements. It is about the words, the brain and how the mind then approaches movement. This implies already the mind-body connection and the efficiency or

synchronicity of mind and body. I personally think that to approach awareness through movement is one possibility, but that we can maybe also approach awareness through the analysis of our thoughts and of how they do function. This is also a way in which, we can work with the Feldenkrais Method. How can mind, thoughts and brain, work together towards initiating an action? It is possible that if there is no gap between thought and action, then it might be efficient ...

You keep exploring movement on stage live, during the performance, why is this important for you?

It is simply pleasant and it keeps the form that we have alive. I am interested in choreography as well and that implies the existence of an outside form that establishes the piece, the product. Researching and improvising on stage is for me very important because it allows me to feel the form in which, we find ourselves, in its liveliness and with the inclusion of our daily existence even with the inclusion of the moment of the performance, of the spirit and presence of the public as well as the colours of space and smells... This is an enormous source of inspiration, but also a set of rather complex discoveries that we have at our disposal, even within the form, there is already structure or choreography or pattern. This is about life, about joy and about giving permission to the mind to be set free as much as possible through movement.

Does the Feldenkrais Method enable you to say what you want to say in your performances?

I don't know. I leave this to the audience to judge. I hope so. I think so, but we are not for ourselves, we exist in an open system of representation and perception. Therefore it is always relative. The way we feel helps us in our approach to convince ourselves but how the public perceives and interprets our work escapes our control. I strongly believe in that connection and this influence, if not, it would not keep me on with so much inspiration. In a way there are complex results, which do not only concern me but also other people and students I work with. It is being proved through the work itself. Such an open system invites different points of view to discuss, to engage, to explore. For all these reasons, I think it works for me.

Has the Feldenkrais Method influenced the way you work with time

and space?

Yes. Everything influences how you work with time and space.

Can you mention any concrete example?

I think, through processes that sensitize our awareness, both inwardly and outwardly, both of these articulations of presence, if the listening/seeing takes place both ways – performers and audience -, then naturally time and space will change. I do not practice in order to change this relationship but it changes by itself along the process.

Does the Feldenkrais Method support your motivation and curiosity? How is it possible that you are not bored yet?

Yes, because as we said, it is such an open system of learning. It is not fixed on physical practice or technique. It is about learning and self-reflection of learning itself. How do we learn to learn? Is it applicable to all the processes we go through in life? It is based on movement, but not on the body itself. There is a fascination of the brain in connection to action and in connection to discovering which capacities, which volumes remain to be used. What is your own potential for creativity, for maintaining curiosity? I am not afraid of being bored because maybe through that method I am able to open my senses, thus to facilitate new inspiration to come innately so to speak. So it is like some kind of a universal connection to life if you wish. It is almost similar to a spiritual approach that would spontaneously open new doors, for new inspiration and new resources to be taken into account and brought along for the next step of our development. And this is precisely the reason why it is impossible in this mindset to get bored.

Georg Blaschke lives in Vienna and works as a freelance performer, choreographer and dance lecturer. He has been dancing and performing with great passion over the past twenty years for contemporary dance, theatre and performance productions of different aesthetic and expressive approaches. His artistic engagement reflects the continuous transformation of the body and its image.

His performances both as a dancer for other artists as well as a creator of his own works have led him to numerous festivals, theatres and schools throughout Austria and abroad.

His actual works are focused on applying a somatic approach on choreographic

understanding and principles of biographical reconstruction and memory of a moving body.

His artistic practice at the present time is strongly influenced by the Feldenkrais Method and especially concerns movement research, partnering work and reflections on the presence of the performer in space.



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Conclusion

In this work, we have presented basic ideas about learning with the Feldenkrais Method as well as their possible application in dance education.

As mentioned throughout this work, the Feldenkrais Method introduces ideas, which might drastically question the way we usually think about learning in the context of dance.

The first part of this work introduces and describes some of the key concepts of the Feldenkrais Method. The core element of the method and the main instrument, upon which its induced process is based, is self-awareness. Awareness gradually accesses to the most forgotten places of ourselves and this in turn widens the way we use ourselves in connection to whatever we do, be it any movement or action. This extended image of our self leads to the improvement of our movement, posture as well as our ability to sense, feel and think. We can reflect clearly on what we are doing and we sense and notice what is necessary to do in order to develop further as artists and as human beings. The student discovers the endless diversity of possible skeletal organisations by becoming able to notice and observe minute differences. She/He is able to sense this while organising her/himself during the ATM lesson. Because of the increased sensitivity therefore resulting flexibility and by attentive self-observation, we can sense an incredible amount of different and unusual anatomical contexts and configurations, which have a strong impact on increasing one's movement vocabulary, one's quality of articulation as well as one's movement possibilities with the skeletal structure. Discovering these unusual anatomical contexts provokes curiosity and motivation for going on experiencing the practice and life from very diverse and new perspectives of sensations, feelings and thoughts that always differ depending on the anatomical context we are moving in.

Discovering ourselves from different perspectives generates inspiration that renders, creativity and learning possible. Routine and habitual movement patterns that no longer serve our improvement, comfort or efficiency can be replaced by more efficient and enhanced patterns. Everything that we are doing can therefore become easier and more efficient. If we can move more easily, we feel an increase of energy, vitality and greater enjoyment of life itself.

The second part of this work analyses a single ATM lesson and describes some of the key concepts of the Feldenkrais Method using this practical example. It shows very practically how such improvements such as effortless movement, creativity or curiosity, are being processed. We can see that such notions are not only abstract nor visionary, but that they can be experienced and integrated in our learning process by paying attention to our senses, through inner genuine dialog, which involves our entire self. This chapter reveals what is so special about this way of teaching and learning. The instructions are full of encouragement to respect and to believe in our needs. Practitioners invite students to be playful, to take it easy, to take plenty of time for listening, and to be open for new sensations, eventually to search for pleasure and comfort. They are supportive throughout the process of finding out our own statements, to move towards becoming more independent and more mature persons. The method is based on movement, but not only of the body itself. Movement is used as a vehicle to explore and learn with our whole self. However we can sense effects deeply in our self, our behaviour and psychological aspects of learning. It addresses mainly the person who stands behind movement with his/her identity.

The third part of this work deals with the application of the Feldenkrais Method to choreography, movement research and performance. Even though learning and performing is not the same thing, we can see in this chapter that it can use similar tools to develop, simply in another context. Performing can be an extension and representation of the presented approaches to learning on stage. Looking at the chosen key concepts from the point of view of performance theory enriches this work with another dimension. In terms of performing, self-awareness represents

“(...) the open presence of the performer, where the mind can shift from the inside to the outside and invites both states and does not exclude anything. This concerns the space that surrounds you, the partners with whom you perform and also the audience members.” Georg Blaschke

This efficiency represents effortlessness, freedom and stability as movement's quality that is important for the embodiment of the performer's message. It is a state that makes the mind transparent, free from parasitic thoughts that are unnecessary and disturbing for the act.

Complexity qualifies the diversity of forms and sensations coming from the body, space, sound and lights that the performer is able to notice and invite into her/his presence.

Individuality characterises organic specialities of the performer. It can be inspired by the performer's emotions, feelings, memories or thoughts, all these create a palette for the dancer/performer and implies everything that stands behind movement.

Curiosity and motivation stands for the ability to be fascinated, fully engaged and inquisitive to every living moment of the performance. Finally it doesn't make sense to split the presented key concepts into single individual ideas, because they are continuously growing from one another. One conditions the other one. Together they create a whole: the human experience of the present moment.

To sum up: rather than technique with fixed rules, the Feldenkrais Method is an open approach to the body and mind upon which the dance technique can be developed. It can be applied to learning technique of ballet as well as for example to techniques of release and performing. As the method is based on individual self-exploration and self-awareness through movement, we might then be able to understand better our own structure and ways we can work and learn with it. This understanding might help us also adapt to forms which are maybe not always organic, functional or familiar to us.

The Feldenkrais Method can be used as a tool to enable us to cope better with various forces and stress connected to dance practice and life. It might also be helpful to come to a mature and conscious relationship about what we do and so to improve the student's evolving identity.

This can be an important message of the Feldenkrais Method when applied to dance education and it is also this essential point that I have tried to convey in this Bachelor work.

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