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Eros and inquiry: the Feldenkrais Method as a complex resource

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Abstract

This essay discusses the Feldenkrais Method as a critical resource within performer training. The essay draws on performance research undertaken between 2004 and 2012 and on pedagogical practice within international dance and actor training contexts. It examines the development of Feldenkrais-informed performance pedagogies as means to facilitate conditions for embodied self-care, collaborative creative inquiry, and an embodied criticality through movement. There is a trend towards democratisation and collaborative practice in Western contemporary performance ecologies and training, calling for autonomous learners and reflective practitioners with a highly developed sense of agency, empathy and psycho-physical flexibility. The essay proposes that informing performer training through Feldenkrais processes and value systems can offer timely educational models that transcend notions of reductionist, discipline-oriented skills provision, by offering embodied modes of artistic questioning and aesthetic inquiry. It argues that the Feldenkrais Method (FM) offers emancipatory, empathy forming, and agency-constituting processes which can support an open-ended and rigorous approach to performer training. By drawing on trans-disciplinary critical theory frameworks the article suggests that FM, as a bio-psycho-social practice, fosters improved mobility, creative inquiry skills and complex thought through inter-subjective de-conditioning processes. It argues that the Feldenkrais Method offers a pedagogical foundation for the vitalising and integration of the learners' sexually potent self into training and performance processes.

Introduction

This essay discusses the Feldenkrais Method (FM) as a critical resource within performer training. It draws on performance research undertaken between 2004 and 2012 and on pedagogical practice within international dance and actor training contexts. The author examines the development of Feldenkrais-informed performance pedagogies as means to facilitate conditions for embodied self-care, collaborative creative inquiry, and an 'embodied criticality' (Kampe 2014) through movement.

There is a trend towards democratisation and collaborative practice in Western contemporary performance ecologies and training, calling for autonomous learners and reflective practitioners with a highly developed sense of agency, empathy and psycho-physical flexibility. This essay suggests that by acknowledging the human being as an environmentally embedded creative learner, both autonomous and relational, the Feldenkrais Method offers emancipatory, empathy-forming, and

agency-constituting processes which can support an open-ended and rigorous approach to performer training. By drawing on trans-disciplinary critical theory frameworks (Adorno 1966, Lorde 1978, Morin and Kern 1999, Morin 1999, 2007, Castoriadis 2005, 2011), the author suggests that FM, as a bio-psycho-social practice, supports the training of performers by offering a complex 'dialogic' (Morin 2007) between awareness-forming processes and improved function of the learner.¹ Feldenkrais suggests that in his work 'the foundations of thinking are different' (Feldenkrais 1981). The essay proposes that FM fosters improved mobility, creative inquiry skills and 'complex thought' (Morin 2007, p. 5) through inter-subjective de-conditioning processes, forming a critical praxis that echoes ethical positions formulated in Theodore Adorno's (1966, p. 2) call for an 'education towards critical self-reflection', and Cornelius Castoriadis' (2005, p. 99) quest to re-invigorate 'the project of autonomy' at the heart of Western democracy. The author tentatively opens up a discussion on emancipatory dimensions of touch-based pedagogies emerging from the integration of Feldenkrais-informed Contact Improvisation (CI) processes into performer training.² The article argues that such pedagogies provide learners with an enhanced sense of agency and social complicity by providing conditions for a fleshing out of the 'erotic as power' (Lorde 1978, p. 1), through the development of a shared embodied professional intimacy. It suggests that the Feldenkrais Method offers a pedagogical foundation for the vitalising and integration of the learners' sexually 'potent self' (Feldenkrais 2002) into training and performance processes as 'our most profoundly creative source' (Lorde 1978, p. 5).

Embodied criticality

In 2013 I completed my practice-led PhD which investigated the transfer of practices and ethos of FM to collaborative performance-making processes.³ The Feldenkrais-informed performance-making processes and pedagogy emerging from my research involve reflective, non-corrective improvisational and touch-based modes of interaction. My PhD positioned FM as a critical practice that uses choreographic means to empower the participant to question habitual behaviour and

¹ Feldenkrais defined function as 'the interaction of the person with the outside world or the self with the environment'. IFF standards of practice: <http://feldenkraismethod.org/en/node/348> (accessed 3 August 2012).

² Contact Improvisation (CI) is a collectively evolving dance form which was developed by Steve Paxton and fellow dancers during the early 1970s in the US. Paxton's original experiments drew from his work with Aikido. He elaborates on the shift in aesthetic intention in the dance practice through Aikido, as 'suddenly not have art be the reason that you were moving the way you were, but you were moving the way you were for survival' (Paxton 2013). The author has been teaching CI all over the globe since 1988.

³ I am drawing on participant feedback of the performance project 'The Dybbuk', written by director/writer Julia Pascal, which ran for 14 performances at The Theatre for The New City in New York City in 2010, after a three-week period of work integrating Feldenkrais-informed processes into the creation period. The project investigated the transfer of somatic educational practices to performance-making processes, drawing on non-corrective educational modalities as found in FM, including the use of questioning and touch interaction as resources for performance creation.

interaction with the world. Feldenkrais (2010, p. 88) claimed to provide learners with 'conditions where they can learn to think. They have to think without words, with images, patterns and connections. That sort of thinking always leads to a new way of action'.

Such embodied, patterned, imaged, connective and divergent thinking can be posited as choreographic thinking. More so, my research contends that FM forms a critical praxis – 'a soma-critique' (Kampe 2014, p. 237) – that echoes ethical positions towards emancipatory pedagogies formulated in Theodore Adorno's seminal essay 'Education after Auschwitz' (1966). Adorno called for an 'education towards maturity' (1966) which must foster self-reflectivity, criticality, autonomy and empathy. FM offers the learner tools for self-reflection, enabling her or him 'to act while he thinks and to think while he acts' (Feldenkrais 1992, p. 60). More so, Feldenkrais lessons are concerned with fostering the capacity of the mature individual for an embodied questioning, to refuse the given, and to de-fuse unreflective behaviour. Such criticality, understood as the ability 'to put into question' habitual behaviour (Beringer 2014), is at the heart of Feldenkrais' (2005) education towards 'mature behaviour'. For Feldenkrais (2005, p. 196) maturity is 'the capacity of the individual to break up total situation of previous experience into parts, to reform them into a pattern most suitable to the present circumstances'.

Feldenkrais' embodied reflexivity forms a practice against what social theorist Cornelius Castoriadis (2011, p. 9) called 'the terrorism of conformist thought, that is to say non-thought', a questioning of habitual and set modes of thought patterning, self-perception and world-making. Feldenkrais' (2010) 'theory of reversibility' forms a position of questioning the given at any time, underpinning design and strategies of embodied criticality inherent in his practices: 'I contend that the adherence to one principle to the utter exclusion of the opposite is contrary to the laws of life' (Feldenkrais 2005, p. 18). The having 'principles of no principles' (Feldenkrais 1981) within the method has implications for the use of repetition, reversal, variation, fragmentation and problem-setting as perturbation within design of lessons, and on the use of questioning and non-correction in social interaction with learners (Feldenkrais 1981).

Complex thought

Feldenkrais was interested in facilitating an embodied criticality and a thinking that is organically linked to sensing, feeling and action: 'Thought that is not connected to feeling at all is not connected to reality' (Feldenkrais 1992, p. 44). The cultivation of non-dualist thinking and critical practice within educational contexts has political dimensions. It provides a praxis for a 'radical reform in thinking',

which complexity-philosopher and ecologist Edgar Morin (2007) urges for in response to a planetary 'poly-crisis' at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Morin (2007, p. iv) proposes a thinking 'that respects diversity as it recognizes unity, and that tries to discern interdependencies, a multidimensional thinking, and an organizational or systemic thinking'. Morin's call for a 'true rationality' forms part of a neo-modernist trans-disciplinary Zeitgeist, which Feldenkrais was part of, that aimed to abandon dualist, reductionist and totalitarian imaginaries for systemic and non-dualist interpretations of natural and cultural development.

A reason that ignores living beings, subjectivity, emotions, and life is irrational ... True rationality is not merely critical, but self-critical. It is recognizable in its ability to recognize its own insufficiencies. (Morin and Kern 1999, p. 129)

My research suggests that Feldenkrais' dynamic-systems perspective on learning, culture and nature (Goldfarb 1990, Ginsburg 2010) offers a practice of complex thought that is concerned with non-linear causalities, relationality and self-questioning.

Being as beings

Feldenkrais offers a radical ecological and complexity ontology that critiques notions of the singular individual as a closed and stable system. He proposes a 'whole self' that is environmentally and socially embedded as a 'functional unity between body, mind, and environment' (Feldenkrais 2005, p. 149). His practices guide the learners' attention towards the feedback loops and fluid relationships between different elements that form the self-regulating biopsychosocial self, environment being understood as sexually-biologically, socially and culturally constructed. Feldenkrais (2010, p. 64) positioned the interventionist and self-transformative potential into the fluid gaps or linkage 'where the elements interact with one another and where the learned use of self is more apparent'. In this way, he believed intentional and habitual response of the social individual to the world can become de-stabilised and flexible, and new, previously seemingly impossible, worlds can be imagined and constructed. It is in the providing of conditions for the imaging and enaction of new relationships – in the how we relate, not what we relate to – that meaningful education towards mature behaviour must function. Maturity consequently inhabits what Castoriadis (2005, p. 314) called 'the paradox of autonomy' – the becoming of a relational and co-dependent being. Adams (2011, p. 39) suggests that for Castoriadis 'being is beings'. For Feldenkrais it is movement and more so touch which forms an embodied transformative imaginary to disrupt and expand the illusionary closure of the rational individual. He suggests that touch can suspend boundaries and binaries between self and other,

forming an act of self-creation of empathetic social unity: 'through touch, the toucher and the touched, can become a new ensemble, ... a new entity' (cited in Ginsburg 2011, p. 267). Such a haptic educational stratagem aims to provide conditions for a construction of a flexible, self-directed and ultimately empathetic person. Steve Paxton, originator of CI, described such inter-subjective merging between movers as 'this third thing, which is what you are together' (Paxton 2013).

The project autonomy: autopoiesis

Feldenkrais challenges notions of the individual as a closed system, by drawing, like Morin and Castoriadis, on the work on 'autopoiesis', or 'self-creation', of the late living-systems cognitive biologist Francesco Varela (1995). His perspective on self-organisation comes close to ecologist Edgar Morin's (2007) rethinking of autopoietic processes as processes of 'self-ecoreorganisation', where being is not only relational but also co-dependent, creative and adaptable, constantly engaged in processes of de-patterning and re-patterning. Castoriadis, who collaborated with Morin, Francois Lyotard and Guy Debord on the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (1949–1966), understood 'the autonomy of the living organism' (Castoriadis 2011, p. 59) as a cognitive process that is governed by a capacity for social relationality which depends on affect and desire. For him, the autonomy of the 'psychic-social being' (Castoriadis 2011, p. 59) relies on a capacity for self-reflection, which in turn informs the self-reflective capacities of autonomous societies. Developing his work from a post-Holocaust position, Feldenkrais (1992, p. 29) envisioned the self-creation of 'a society of men and women with greater awareness of themselves'. His vision parallels Castoriadis' (2011, p. 72) call to 'create a society in which autonomous human beings can collectively govern themselves in autonomy'.

Enactivist self-imaging

Feldenkrais developed a use of imagery, imagining and 'self-imaging' (Beringer 2001) within his practice, which is multi-modal and synergistic. It includes verbal and sensory imagery, motor-imagery as in imagining movement without moving, and an 'enactivist approach to imagery' (Thomas 2011) where sensation and image are generated through movement and self-observation. Feldenkrais prioritises such an enactivist approach, based on the assumption that any living organism must constantly be concerned with self-imaging and self-construction as an evolutionary necessity. Thomas (2011) elaborates on 'enactive theories of imagery', stating

that perception is not mere passive receptivity but a form of action,
something done by the organism. The perceiving organism is not merely

registering but exploring and asking questions of its environment, . . . seeking out the answers in the sensory stimuli that surround it.

Accessing, utilising and developing skills for such embodied questioning, in order to improve self-perception and interaction with the world, is at the heart of the practices developed by Moshe Feldenkrais, and the transfer of such questioning into performer training processes is of interest to me.

Self-image and the social imaginary

Feldenkrais was influenced by the work of neurologist and psychiatrist Paul Schilder (1886–1940) on ‘Body Image’, ‘Self Consciousness’ and ‘Spatial Image’:⁴

We act in accordance to our self-image. This self-image - which, in turn, governs our every act - is conditioned by varying degree by three factors, heritage, education and self-education. (Feldenkrais 1992, p. 3)

It is within the notion of self-education that Feldenkrais saw an ideal place for intervention with potential for personal and social change. He designed his practices to access the potential of the individual where self is not solely instituted by heritage and society. His practices privilege what Castoriadis (2005) coined the creative ‘self-instituting’ capacities of the individual. Castoriadis called for a move away from the ‘instituted society’ toward an awakening of the creative imaginary of the individual as a source for self-instituting democratic society. Such awakening echoes concerns of Moshe Feldenkrais, who sought to foster ‘a de-conditioning, the liberation, in which we develop a self-active part which liberates the individual from his subjective enslavement’ through reflective embodied processes.⁵ Ethically, my pedagogy seeks to investigate how a Feldenkrais-informed performer training can shift questions from individual self-imaging to a shared embodied inter-subjective ‘Creative Imaginary’ that challenges and subverts a ‘Dominant Social Imaginary’ which Castoriadis (2005, p. 287) asserts as ‘the psychosocial structures of the contemporary individual, the kinds of behaviour the very operation of this society is constantly tending to produce and reproduce’.

Becoming soft people: Feldenkrais-informed practices

I have taught FM-informed classes for performers in various contexts in higher education since 2000. I currently teach Movement for Actors on the BA Acting at Bath Spa University, after having designed and coordinated a somatic-informed dance curriculum at London Metropolitan University between 2002 and 2012. While I identify a common physiological thread within FM towards a ‘relational body’

⁴ For a critical perspective on Feldenkrais’ use of Schilder’s terminology see Ginsburg (1999).

⁵ The late Systems Theory thinker Katzir, in conversation with Moshe Feldenkrais, in Feldenkrais (2010, p. 173).

(Batson 2008) that privileges core mobility, poly-centricity and omni-directionality, the focus on bodily skills development through FM practices varies from year group to year group and also between acting students and dance students.

Contemporary dance students often need to improve functions in relation to coping with complex changes in shape, weight transfer, balance and spatial orientation, which involve often large and fast changes in level and direction. Here, perhaps a focus on activating core–limb connectivity and flexibility, and three-dimensional mobility of pelvis and torso and their weighted use in space are privileged in choice of lessons. Small-scale functional explorations and discoveries are often probed in large, expansive and highly dynamic contexts. While in my work with actors I also consistently work with testing mobility and coordination within dynamically and spatially challenging situations, a different physiological focus has emerged in my pedagogy. On the one hand, I am taking more time to develop functions such as breathing, chest articulation and a dynamic gesturing of head, eyes and mouth, and often integrate vocalisation into the lessons. More so, I am taking more time to allow for students to engage with identifying psycho-physical connectivity and resonances emerging through very small postural changes, gesture or shifts in stance. The questions I ask during lessons are focussing much more on: ‘How does this feel now? What sort of self-image or sense of self have I, or have we constructed – through movement, or while moving?’

For actors, the ability to discern small differences in psycho-physical perception and action, and to respond to those, forms part of key rehearsal practice, character study and scenic play. Director Julia Pascal elaborates on the effect of such questioning in rehearsal processes with actors:

You often ask ‘how does that feel’? You make the person experience their own bodies as if it’s a new coat, and that is very exciting, and makes the person realize that they can expand and grow in a way they had not thought of before.

(Writer-director Julia Pascal, in conversation with the author, 8 August 2010)

Dance students are often asked to distance their personal, everyday life self-image from their classroom dancer identity (Fortin et al. 2009). This might be due to the extra-daily (Barba 2005) demands and at times style-driven nature of dance skills training that moves beyond pedestrian dynamics and shape content. As Fortin (2009) and Green (2001) suggest, it also reflects a still dominant heteronomous self-image of the dancer in training and professional context where choreographer or teacher hold masterly power as decision-makers within learning processes. Natalie Garrett-Brown (2011) argues for an emancipatory ‘somatic-informed dance practice’ as a political project that stands in line with the Release tradition as developed by US dance pioneer

Mary O'Donnell and others. My own practice as a dance pedagogue has been concerned with investigating the application of the Feldenkrais Method as an empowering and agency-constituting tool to develop pedagogies 'that recognize the emergent dancing subject as a feature of the work' (Garrett- Brown 2011, p. 71).

My pedagogy draws on my own experience as a performer and performance-maker, on a lived understanding of twentieth-century actor training approaches which propose the creative human organism as psychophysically malleable and socially embedded, and on twentieth-century creative dance and movement practices. These include most notably the spatial and dynamic psycho-physical enquiries emerging from Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), the intimate touch-based dialogue of Contact Improvisation and the neo-modernist dance project of 'Release'. Mary O'Donnell described 'Release' as an 'extended scientific and philosophical inquiry' which renders the practice of dance as a 'platform for the exploration of societal ethics, with the training and management of individual responsibility and freedom being the basis'.⁶ Perhaps in line with an ideology akin to the Feldenkrais Method, dancer and pedagogue Pauline de Groot (2014), who integrated practices informed by ideokinetic and martial arts into dance learning processes in the Netherlands during the late 1960s, described the ethos of 'Release' as a project of 'becoming soft people'.

Working with the person

BA Acting students at Bath Spa University have repeatedly commented that the Feldenkrais-informed classes were the only classes that are about themselves (Year 2 students 2013: classes combined FM practices with contact improvisation). Student Jonathan (Year 2, 2014) describes the Feldenkrais-informed CI classes as having been 'particularly helpful in allowing me to become a much more sensitive and conscious listener through the body'.⁷ Actors in training are asked to identify themselves in different ways than dancers with their actions, character and scenic practice. The dominant contemporary UK theatre training practice arising from a post-Stanislvskian aesthetics asks the actor to connect to their 'inner truth', to be 'authentic', 'believable', to 'respond truthfully' to external circumstances or inner drives, to 'be spontaneous' rather than to overtly instrumentalise a precisely tuned athletic body. Evans (2008, p. 216) suggests that a movement training towards 'neutrality' for the actor aims to enable students to develop an inner connectivity through an outer technique, offering to 'collapse the distance between "inner" and "outer" for the student actor'. Evans (2008, p. 122) further suggests that movement training for actors has moved away from a

⁶ MOD: Open Form to Responsible Anarchy: Autobiographical Thought: <http://appleaday.nl/releasedance/ReleaseDance/pdf/MODhistory%20of%20ideas.pdf> (accessed 28 June 2014).

⁷ The author has included student feedback from BA Acting students at Bath Spa University. The feedback was taken, with permission of the individual students, from questionnaires given at the end of each term to all year groups on the impact of movement lessons on student progress.

striving for a normative, technical body, towards allowing for a playful 'unruly body' as a source for creative endeavour.

Second-year BA Acting student Annie (2014) commented upon her learning experience through Feldenkrais-informed CI classes:

The workshops enabled to interact with my fellow actor in a much more truthful, grounded and intimate way. [. . .] The supportive, experimental and playful environment that is created in the classroom inspires you to push boundaries and fully submerge yourself in activities that, only a year ago, were alien and unknown. This experience has taught me to be a fully physical being that is alive and ready to take on any challenge.

In my lessons I combine Awareness through Movement (ATM) and Functional Integration (FI) processes with following periods of improvisation and verbal reflection. This allows students to explore newly found movement skills or a change in self-image outside of traditional ATM or FI contexts, and makes space for group or peer discussion where students engage in reflective translation processes from experience back into verbal language. Such combination gives students more time and space for self-regulated exploration and mimics professional creative contexts where performers are asked to explore and generate choreographic movement material or devise character and scenic interaction. It also disturbs a hierarchy of student–learner relationships within FM, where the facilitator often still takes a more verbally dominant role within the learning context. I am interested in students not only becoming autonomous movers, but autonomous in their capacity to reflect and verbally articulate embodied concerns.

Preparatory practice and kinaesthetic tuning

While Feldenkrais-informed classroom situations are designed for creative and personal development of the student, they aim to prepare professional functioning in a laboratory context. Students learn to observe and play creatively through their own or shared movement experience. Ultimately, I am interested in learners feeling at home in their sensory reality and being able to become articulate, agile and conversant as observers and players within such an embodied world. A returning to detailed awareness-forming processes, as on offer through ATM and FI, can serve as a kinaesthetic tuning practice for learners. This fosters, on the one hand, a distinct improved functioning, such as fluidity in spinal articulation or a more specific use of eye–head coordination, but more so enables performers to access feedback loops between sensation, action, feeling and

emotion. A key initial aim of my classes with BA Acting students is to empower students to develop their own preparatory tuning processes with little intervention from the tutor, and to shift responsibility for individual learning from teacher to learner. In each lesson students are given time to find out what they need to do to make themselves more comfortable and ready to engage with their environment. Students are developing their own self-care practice based upon a growing skills base, and are learning to tune and enact their 'awared' selves (Feldenkrais 2010, p. 34) by drawing on Feldenkrais modalities or mini-ATM lessons or FI touch exchanges. Bath Spa University BA Acting Year 1 students commented on responding creatively to embodied concepts explored in classes as a resource for self-organised practice:

I take a moment to make myself aware within the space that surrounds me. I do small stretches, pat my ribs, and then move my body through space. I am enjoying learning about my body and how it all works together. I am finding it intriguing to learn about how everything is connected. (Anisha, 2013)

I follow concepts introduced to us in class in a way that I am comfortable with, but also pushed by. My general body awareness has improved massively. When working at home or simply stretching I feel I am more secure in my knowledge and abilities. (Jess, 2013)

Students repeatedly suggest that working from a place of comfort allows for independent inquiry – described as a gentle stretching or pushing, but also as a working with and around limitations:

I feel more confident to take movement in my own stride, to stretch myself beyond my limits whilst also remaining comfortable in my own skin. I found the warm ups challenging at first but I feel more confident now. I have found movement based warm ups that work around my injured knee and neck without hurting them, which is a big improvement. (Chloe, 2013)

The above student suggests that such general embodied comfort, together with an increase in movement range, allows for more confidence in nonverbal communication as an actor:

I am far more comfortable now in my own body. My flexibility has improved vastly and I am more coordinated. I feel more confident to express my emotion through movement. I feel I am able to communicate more clearly. (Chloe, 2013)

Weaving

In my movement classes I transcend the ATM or FI formats by weaving Feldenkrais ethos and principles (or no principles) into the overarching fabric of my pedagogy. This includes teaching through questioning, a slowing down to give time for self- and peer observation through action/reflection cycles and feedback loops, and a facilitating of conditions for learning through small approximations. Through the use of repetition, variation, de-familiarisation and disorientation I aim to construct a dialogic between familiarity, 'novelty of sensation' (Feldenkrais 2010, p. 37) and the 'necessary encounter with the unfamiliar' (Mumford and Garde 2011). While creating a non-corrective and non-normative environment for pleasurable enquiry through absence of demonstration, and through extensive use of verbal instruction and touch, I encourage students to 'test the extremes' (Rywerant 2000, p. 13) in their actions and self-image in non-threatening ways. This allows learners to experience heightened force, speed, precision and a sense of abandon and expansiveness, and to transfer their newly acquired embodied self-image into creative situations that anticipate the often highly dynamic demands of theatrical practice. Julia Pascal, co-director of the research project *The Dybbuk* (2010), comments on the effects of such dynamic extending of FM modalities:

It works because the performers are emotionally more available and free and connected to each other and themselves. When you then bring in Grotowski- or Laban-based strategies or grotesque imagery, they have already a solid confident base where they don't feel judged, they are just being asked to stretch. (Pascal in Kampe 2011, p. 266)

As a pedagogue, I consistently need to balance notions of a non-corrective learner-centred stance that supports individual development of the autonomous person through movement, and a heteronomous goal-oriented mode of skills development. Bath Spa University Year 2 student Iulian (2013) describes the dialogic between a pleasurable change in self-perception and an increase in embodied movement knowledge:

It gave me confidence and purpose in movement, and it opened a new world for me, widening my movement palette [. . .]. It made me feel great, more aware of what my body is saying and being braver in movement. [. . .] It changed my perception of relating through movement completely from the point of view of energy, force and meaning, making me more confident and open about movements that I never even dreamt I could ever do.

Complex processes

I understand the weaving and transfer of FM into performer training pedagogies – a process-of-enquiry-within-a-process-of-enquiry – as a complex system that involves a large number of interacting agents, and which allows for conditions for uncertainty and emergent non-linear causalities. In the following section I will draw on Edgar Morin's 'Three Principles of Complexity' (Morin and Kern 1999) - The Dialogic Recursiveness The Holographic - to illuminate possible processes of transfer FM dynamic-systems 'principles' and ethos into performer training and performance-making contexts:

The Dialogic: A providing of conditions which allow for ambiguity, diversity, openness and flexibility. Morin and Kern (1999, p. xv) describes the 'The Dialogic' as 'the symbiotic combination of two logics, a combination that is at once complementary, concurrent, and antagonistic'. Feldenkrais' 'Theory of Reversibility' as a working position of having 'no principles' makes space for multi-dimensionality, embodied questioning and critical playfulness in practice. Feldenkrais' anti-totalitarian notions of non-correctiveness – 'to correct is incorrect!' – allow for an embracing of the paradox between the different perspectives of the living agents of artistic and learning processes.⁸ Actor Juliet Dante in the research project *The Dybbuk* (2010) commented on the effect of Feldenkrais-informed rehearsal strategies as enhancing a cocreational ethos that supports a relational 'trust that we know what we're doing, but we also know what the others are doing because we're all doing it together' (J. Dante and S. Perlin in conversation with the author, 11 August 2010). Dante further suggested that the non-corrective modalities within FM allow for an environment that fosters inquiry and risk-taking within creative processes:

Because of the combination of things, the 'no inhibitions' in the small fine tunings [. . .] Feldenkrais does something that takes away that inhibition from the word go, when you know that there's no right or wrong, when it's open, getting a different relationship. It immediately changes the relationship between the actors. (J. Dante and S. Perlin in conversation with the author, 11 August 2010)

Recursiveness: A providing of conditions for flow of information through feedback-loops within 'the dialogic'. 'A process is recursive when it produces the elements or effects necessary for its own generation or existence' (Morin and Kern 1999, p. xv). My pedagogy is concerned with developing conditions for recursiveness within performer-training processes:

⁸ The title of a talk by Moshe Feldenkrais, Amherst Professional Feldenkrais training, 15 June 1981.

The creation of conditions for self-awareness, as capacity for observation of non-linear causality between action, 'sensory insight' and affect (Rywerant 2001). Feldenkrais (2010, p. 174) suggests that awareness 'listens to the action. Such listening, I think, is the first feedback without feedback it is impossible to condition or de-condition a grown-up person'. I aim to acknowledge the embodied and affective position of the self-observer, through the use of a questioning that facilitates an environment for embodied listening and inquiry. Collaborating director Julia Pascal (in conversation with the author, 8 August 2010) elaborates on the effect of such transfer of questioning into rehearsal for *The Dybbuk* as a process where performers 'are examining sensation, [. . .] using emotional and intellectual parts of the self at the same time'. She further suggests a unifying effect of such practices for the performer.

In rehearsal, you are constantly encouraging to ask questions; you are verbalizing all the time – how does this feel? You are synthesizing the body-mind by the fact of questioning. So, the person is forever connecting the two, they are not shut off mentally because they are doing a physical action.

BA Acting Year 1 students suggest an increased knowledge and curiosity about psycho-physical feedback loops:

I am much more aware of who I am physically and the movements I do in day to day tasks. I also feel my body more in other classes. I have found that the dynamics and expression in the way I move have had an impact on the way I feel about things and my general mood. I find this very interesting. (Jamie, 2013)

I have felt a significant difference in my overall quality of movement. I did not realize how emotions influence the way we move until now. And I have started to incorporate my feeling towards something into my body language. (Larry, 2013)

I can notice connections between my thoughts and my movements. (Charles, 2013)

The creation and modulation of feedback loops between participants within learning and performance-making processes to support communication within the social interaction of the dialogic creative process. Feldenkrais (2010, p. xv) proposes the human being as an environmentally embedded creature, environment being understood as 'space, gravitation, and society'. He suggests that 'the human environment involves the self and the self-image as well as the sexual, the social, and cultural' (Feldenkrais 2010, p. 63). Consequently my pedagogy and interpretation of the method involve a providing of conditions for a relating of the learner to a lived, empathetic, desiring and desired environment. This can happen through touch interaction, or a sharing of spatial and temporal relationships and the inclusion of eye contact. Bath Spa Year 2 student Matt (2014) suggests that Feldenkrais-informed learning provides conditions for a relational connectivity with the world, a being 'more aware of myself along with my surroundings, allowing me to play, move and interact with others in ways that before I would have never even thought about'. Assistant Director Kimberley Sykes, participant in the research project *The Dybbuk*, elaborates on the effect of the opening of feedback loops between group members:

And your awareness begins – like a ripple – to widen, so you go into your whole body, and then you address your body in relation to other bodies, and then when you say 'now make contact with people, make eye contact with people and how does that affect your relationship to space?' [. . .] it creates a kind of 'total awareness', I found. (S. Karsberg and K. Sykes in conversation with the author, 10 August 2010)

Feldenkrais placed a focus on a pleasurable empathetic dialogue between teacher and learner as a listening mode towards a restoring of dignity of the human being through embodied processes of de-conditioning. This suggests a compassionate stance and trans-subjective intimacy and openness towards self and other as the self-image of the practitioner in the moment of touch. Rywerant 2000 suggests that key psychic-social imaginaries within Feldenkrais mode of touch interaction are embodied notions of 'support' and 'clarification'. The transfer of touch interventions as used in Feldenkrais FI practice to improvisational learning situations involve non-corrective haptic dialogues of listening, following, guiding, and manipulation which can shift focus from detailed hands-on inquiry to whole-body touch exchanges. Pascal (in conversation with the author, 8 August 2010) suggests that such touch interaction enables performers to 'allow themselves to be free with their own bodies and other bodies, and their sexual and creative self comes through in the group and in performance'.

Feldenkrais lessons propose a bias towards a corporeality which emphasises a multi-directional and relational core mobility, while prioritising qualities of lightness and softness in dynamic flow. Re-activating a sensitive and articulate 'culture of pelvis and hip joints' (Feldenkrais 2005, p. 105) through touch interactions forms a key part of FM-informed rehearsal or learning situations. Actor Simeon Perlin (in conversation with the author, 11 August 2010) identified touch dialogues explored as working modalities in *The Dybbuk* as 'uninhibited physical interaction, at times almost brutal, erotic and primal' In my current work situation at Bath Spa University FM-informed processes and Contact Improvisation form a core of the students' learning experience: acting students need to heighten their own self-reflexivity, psycho-physical connectivity and social inter-connectivity. Such connectivity includes a desiring creaturely awareness, and expressive capacity for immediate affective response to the world. Autopoiesis, underpinning FM practices, offers a model for trans-subjective dialogue which acknowledges intention, affect and desire as emergent and self-creational. While my FM-informed CI classes include the engagement with sensitive and athletic partnering skills I seek to embrace the psycho-social dimensions of the practice.

Before these classes, though we all felt comfortable interacting and working together, I feel there was always a barrier that would stop us engaging in intimate contact, especially notable if the work would involve our middle, our pelvic areas for obvious reasons! These classes have, by far, knocked down that barrier and taught us that it is acceptable and, in some cases, necessary to connect and, by doing so, achieve a far higher standard of performance in all areas. I certainly feel that Feldenkrais opens our perception of ourselves but, by doing this first, it allows us to then become perceptive of others. [. . .] having that understanding of my physicality makes it far easier to share with others. The sharing, in fact, feels like the real purpose and the most satisfying part of Feldenkrais. (Ben, Year 2 student, 2013).

Feldenkrais (2002) emphasises a non-compulsive, yet fully lived sexual vitality in his writings as a prerequisite for mature capacity for social interaction. In my teaching of Year 2 students, whose practical work is accompanied through the study of Critical Theory in contextual modules, I am trying open a discussion on the critical dimensions of both FM and CI through contextual reading and debate. After a discussion on the shared reading of African- American feminist writer Audrey Lorde's 'The Uses of The Erotic: the Erotic as Power' (1978) with the student group, several questions emerged at the beginning of class:

How do FM-informed processes disrupt patriarchal corporeal imaginaries and ways of social interaction that are rooted in notions of instrumentalisation, control and domination?

What alternatives do they offer to construct a social imaginary that is based on mutuality, support and unknowing?

How do these practices foster ways of accessing a professional intimacy that integrates the erotic into our professional work as an emerging ensemble?

How do our touch explorations challenge our socially constructed habits of gender interaction?

Year 2 student Mark described the experience of FM-informed CI practices as a very liberating experience allowing me to express myself in a way that I have never experienced. My original idea of the erotic, that it is purely a sexual thing, has been revealed to me as a social construct and that the erotic is more about intimacy and support; this has allowed me to approach both genders with the same kind of passion. (Mark, 2014)

Students also reflected on the empowering effect of an emerging relational identity, where touch-based interaction based on FM and CI

creates a completely different sense of self. You can do things you didn't realise you were capable of, just by allowing your partner to lead you a certain way, or for you to lead them. And being so close with other people allows you to form a bond with them, even if the contact only lasts a few minutes. You begin to discover their patterns and ways of moving, and you let them into your movements too. This fluid partnership is leaderless and unrestricted, and this creates an empowering energy. (Gaby, Year 2, 2014)

The creation of conditions for pattern support and perturbation, to enhance, develop and deviate from emerging patterns or themes. Feldenkrais lessons are designed to encourage the learner to notice patterns of habitual ease, to enhance and develop those, and then through processes of repetition, variation, reversal and the setting of constraints divert from those, find new movement possibilities. In my teaching I aim to facilitate a supportive ethos by encouraging students to work from first embodied impulse and through trial and error in situations of improvisational play. Bath Spa BA Acting students suggest that such a non-corrective attitude in learning situations leads to a

greater sense of 'self-efficacy' – an accepting and self-valuing of felt experience (Bandura 1994) and a development of greater confidence:

I feel a lot better about my body – now I think of what I can do, not what I want to do. (Tommy, Year 1, 2013)

Feldenkrais made me embrace and find a love for my body I have never had, and makes me no longer fear the things I cannot yet do, but makes me want to tackle them with a positive energy. (Matt, Year 2, 2014)

FM modes of inquiry include problem-setting and problem-solving through physical constraints, de-familiarisation and disorientation strategies. Such perturbations are designed 'to divorce the aim to be achieved from the learning process itself' (Feldenkrais 2010, p. 67) and to stimulate curiosity, which Feldenkrais (2010, p. 81) positioned as 'the only real quality that is innate in human beings'. Pascal (in conversation with the author, 8 August 2010) describes the transfer of such disturbing, disorienting, restricting, or opposing of emerging patterns within creation processes as a 'questioning which transmutes into a body change allows the person to widen and realize they are capable of much more'. Year 1 student Lauren illustrates such widening as an emerging mode of inquiry which combines an embodied familiarity with a growing curiosity to seek alternative sensory insights or creative solutions.

I feel more at one with myself when moving. I have become more motivated to try new things and stretch in new ways. When I feel an emotion I am now able to express this in new ways. I am now able to distinguish between what works best for each emotion. (Lauren, 2013)

Year 3 student Jemima (2014) suggests that modalities of problem-solving within FM-informed learning situations 'helped me to move away from my preconceptions. It took the "performance" out of my experimentation and allowed me to be more creative and original'.

The Holographic: Kelly describes this as 'the recursive dialogic of part and the whole' (Kelly, in Morin and Kern 1999, p. xvi). Feldenkrais lessons are concerned with breaking up whole situations into parts and with de-patterning and re-patterning the relationship of parts to the whole, and designed to suspend habitual environmental contexts, aiming to de-stabilise habitual thinking and

behaviour. Such recursive dialogic – a zooming in and out – between detailed embodied inquiries, and a connecting to a broader contextualisation of an awareness of the ‘whole self’ in relation to its social environment, forms a recurring practice within my pedagogy. Actor Juliet Dante (in conversation with the author, 11 August 2010) suggested that FM supports a creative attending to ‘little things that have a much profound effect’. Bath Spa Year 1 students described relational thinking as a creative position that investigates the relationship between differentiated body units, whole body functions, emotional attitude and observation of environment.

I used to only think about my legs if I was walking; now I think of my spine and my shoulder and my body as a whole when I take a step. (Lou, 2013)

I feel like my breathing has become much more integrated with my movements. This connection makes my movements much more fluid, I feel. (Mark, 2013)

I feel more like a singular unit that is completely connected and on its way to being in tune. I have seen how a simple movement can change the whole feeling and emotional story. I can also read other people’s body language better. (Annie, 2013)

As a teacher I am drawing on Feldenkrais’ complexity model of a functional unity between body, mind and environment and the flexibility in holographic relationships within the emergent autopoietic organism. I repeatedly ask questions regarding changes in self-perception and action in relation to the structural coupling between the organism and the material and social world.

What can I do to organise my fleshy reality in more comfortable ways? How does this attending to inward change affect my sense of self?

What happens when I begin to open my perception outwards towards my material environment? When I begin to see the environment, and improve my contact with the ground? How does this opening inward and outward affect my psycho-physical sense of self?

What happens when I begin to open my attention towards the other people, creaturely organisms, or social beings? How does this connecting to the other social beings affect my internal sense of self?

While asking students to engage with a practice, I attend to this relational tuning myself as a pedagogue. I interact with the learners from such opened and aware place of discovery which allows for flexibility to holographically look inwards and outwards at the same time. Pascal (in conversation with the author, 8 August 2010) describes this as: 'You are always opening; opening new rooms in the house, opening new doors, opening new experiences'.

Critical modalities

In this essay I have tried to illuminate how FM and FM-informed performertraining modalities can offer a rich and non-determinist complexity perspective that challenges dominant social imaginaries for self-construction and social interaction rooted in separation, rationality and mastery (Castoriadis 2005). Modes of disoriented interacting with the world, as found within FM-informed processes, allow participants to relearn sensory motor feedback loops necessary for complex thought and communication, and to engage in shared inter-corporeal experiences which actor Stefan Karsberg positioned as 'liberating for the ensemble, [. . .] the collective and the individual' (in conversation with the author, 10 August 2010). If I embrace Isabelle Ginot's (2011) call to construct somatic practices as critical practices, FM-informed pedagogies appear as radical learning modalities that potentially sit uneasily within institutional contexts. As Morin reminds us, a 'true rationality [. . .] enters into dialogue with a reality that resists it' (Morin and Kern 1999, p. 129).

How can non-corrective practices that challenge instrumentalist perspectives on skills facilitation be positioned in corporate educational frameworks that rely on judgement, surveillance and vocational goal orientation?

How can underlying emancipatory value systems within FM, aiming to give the individual tools for self-reflection, criticality and autonomy in self-reconstruction, be transmitted in modularised classroom situations?

How can empathetic touch-based processes that support a growing 'from psychical monad to social individual' (Castoriadis 2005, p. 434) and which challenge academic teacher–learner relationships, function in educational and cultural contexts that associate touch with sexuality, abuse and domination?

How can Feldenkrais' (2002) recurring emphasis on 'sexual potency' serve as a pedagogical resource to access the vitalised and shared creaturely 'erotic

guides from within' (Lorde 1978, p. 53) as empowering performance knowledge within professional contexts?

FM-informed practices offer an indirect educational model where habitual value systems are challenged through movement. Such investigative and transformative ethos as found in FM comes close to German performance theorist Gesa Ziemer's (2009) call for a trans-disciplinary arts practice and education that indirectly links a de-stabilised and emergent perceptive self to societal change:

Art researches in areas where there is nothing to know. Where linguistic eloquence is being slowed down, where we are disoriented and touched at the same time to perceive something. This is exactly where new questions and ways of seeing emerge. It is never art for art's sake, but indirectly influences attitudes, values, ways of interacting and actions. Art forms the social through and through – without being social work. (Translation by the author)

I suggest that the informing of performer training through FM processes and value systems can offer timely educational models that transcend notions of reductionist, discipline-oriented skills provision, by offering embodied modes of artistic questioning and aesthetic inquiry. Students identified such processes as 'translatable to many areas of acting, useful time and time again throughout our training' (Jemima, Year 3, 2014). More so, I would argue that Feldenkrais-informed practices support developments towards a complexity dimension within education that is concerned with the study of 'the realities of human knowledge, its systems, infirmities, difficulties, and its propensity to error and illusion' (Morin 1999, p. 1); a providing of conditions for a learning where the emerging artist 'can become aware of both his complex identity and his shared identity with all other human beings' (Morin 1999, p. 23).

In his UNESCO-commissioned publication *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future*, Edgar Morin (1999, p. 2) argues that 'the human condition should be an essential subject of all education', and that the 'complex unity of human nature has been so thoroughly disintegrated by education divided into disciplines, that we can no longer learn what human being means'. Throughout this essay I have attempted to articulate how FM informed pedagogies can offer a unifying, yet critical, access to a creative questioning of the human condition as an emergent, autopoietic and uncertain social being. Feldenkrais (2010, p. 181) proposed a utopian perspective on human evolution which promises social progress through an education towards conditions where 'humanoids can develop into homo sapiens, human beings with intelligence, knowledge and awareness'. Such reflective

evolutionary becoming, as a step towards Castoriadis' (2011) 'autonomous societies', seems akin to Morin's (1999, p. 23) concept of 'hominization'. Morin (1999, p. 23) proposes that 'the study of hominization is of capital importance for education to the human condition because it shows how our human condition is a combination of animality and humanity'. It is this combination of animality and humanity – a creaturely criticality and an inhabiting of the erotic within the Feldenkrais Method which can provide modalities with transformative potential for the learner within performer training.

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