

Deidre Sklar, Introduction to :
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Because I am not your usual dancer or Feldenkrais practitioner,) I will start with giving you some information about my work and that will give you a sense of how we will be approaching the interesting challenge of Feldenkrais vis a vis dance.

I consider myself to be a “mover” rather than a “dancer.” And an *observer* of movement. And a “translator” -- my thinking lies at the interface between movement and words.

As a child I took the subway weekly from Brooklyn to the 3rd Street Music Settlement in Manhattan to take Modern Dance with Lucas Hoving, José Limon’s partner. At the same time, I grew up with folk dancing. At the same time, I was always making theatre, directing and performing.

Theatre was what I studied in college and graduate school, and I made theatre for many years, continuing to study modern dance.

But I got fed up with talking heads theatre, believing that it was our physicality – our movement -- that had the power to communicate most deeply and directly what it is to be human, so I quit graduate school in directing & studied *Corporeal Mime* in Paris (in ’68) with Etienne Decroux.

Decroux Mime is not pantomime; it is a rigorous technique like ballet or modern. One learns to “play the body like a keyboard” in 3 dimensions. Add to that what Decroux called *dynamo rhythm*: the intentional use of muscle tonus and *time* (rhythm & speed) for maximum expressivity.

I think Moshe Feldenkrais would have liked it – thinking geometrically, one learns to make subtle distinctions. We used to have to watch each other perform improvisations called *Meditation* (“Thinking”) when done as a solo, and “Research Scientists in a Laboratory” when done in a group.

Eventually I stopped being interested in making theatre altogether, stopped being interested in “show business” and turned to the larger question of “making belief,” that is, how, around the world, we *embody*, in rituals, our beliefs -- about the nature of reality, our place in it, our convictions about what it is to be human. We put our bodies on the line to *convince* ourselves, together in a group, of who we are. My performance had joined up with the big questions.

To study movement in this cultural mode, I did degrees in Dance Ethnology and Performance Studies. In particular, I learned the art of *movement analysis*, that is, separating out movement into its elements of gesture (the *shape* of movement), spatial patterns, how a movement

pattern unfolds over time – via rhythm and speed, in combination with qualities of energy (again *dynamo rhythm*). Like Corporeal Mime, here was another tool for distinguishing one thing from another and for putting the pieces together to come to understand what people are experiencing and communicating.

Fieldwork was a place to test out all the studying. My research was among the Spanish Catholic -Puebloan *indigenes* of Las Cruces NM, working alongside them in the kitchen, walking in the processions and pilgrimage, and whenever I was allowed, participating in, doing movement analysis.

I asked whether it one could approach the *experience of belief* through embodied actions rather than merely through the more traditional method of talking. Of course, there also had to be words. As I wrote in my first publication: “To understand movement... one has to move into words. Nonetheless, movement is always an immediate corporeal experience ... [and] talking cannot reveal what is known through the media of movement.”

It turned out that, when *trained to see* movement both quantitatively and qualitatively, this method of translating between visual information and kinesthetic reverberation does indeed open aspects of embodied experience that cannot be understood through words alone.

This kind of “translation” between visual and kinesthetic became the basis of my methodology for doing fieldwork, for looking at dance, and for writing dance description and cultural analysis. (fn 1 goes here)

Teaching college dance students was the next step. After many years of observing ballet & modern dance students, and watching and interviewing professional performers, it is my perception that more than ordinary, non-specialist movers, dancers *do what they do* and *think how they think* (primarily)¹ at the intersection of visual and kinesthetic modalities.

Dancers tack between “the mind’s eye” – that is visual imagination – and kinesthetic sensation – either the kinesthetic sensations of an embodied movement unfolding OR the imagined kinesthetic sensations of that movement.

The Feldenkrais practitioners listening will already have noted that this is also what we do: I will return to this, but first:

I suggest that:

Dancing is a *way of thinking*.² [Just as visual artists think – not in words, but – in visual images, structures, patterns and rhythms, and musicians think – not in words—but in complex interplay of tones, timbres, rhythms]

¹ Of course, both sound and verbal information are involved

² Allegra Fuller Snyder

Dancers think in a lexicon of (demo these) spatial, gestural, rhythmic and dynamic patterns and structures that are meaningful in a likewise non-verbal way but here the thinking is experienced kinesthetically not outside but AS one's own embodied being. Amazing! (I like to call this way of thinking kinesthetic-conceptual) ³

This kinesthetic-conceptual thinking also manifests outwardly – to spectators as visual information. And, to some spectators who translate, as I did, from seeing, back, in themselves, to kinesthetically feeling the movement. This one of the joys of watching dance, this vicarious experience of movement (I hope).

Feldenkrais practitioners intentionally, with awareness and discernment as well as with a sense of pleasure, tack between visualizing a move in the mind's eye and attending to its kinesthetic sensation. For example, we rely on (and teach) *doing* “in imagination,” which is none other than joining visualizing the details of a movement with feeling its kinesthetic unfolding.

We do this differently than dancers do, however. The difference lies in the kind of awareness, in what Moshe calls over and over again, “Paying Attention.” This is what I propose to demonstrate. I propose to bring out what he means by “paying attention,” how his Method of awareness can enhance and deepen what dancers already do.

What if we could help dancers *improve* the visual-kinesthetic relationship? What if we could help the mind to foster an alert, discerning and kind relationship with that braiding? (in order to both improve functioning and also improve self-image)

Thanks to the genius of Moshe Feldenkrais, we have tools to deepen and refine this dancerly way of thinking.

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³ David Efron