

*Hypothesis and Theory*

## **'crossing/weaving': somatic interventions in choreographic practices**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to articulate how collaborative choreographic processes can be informed through somatic educational practices. Focusing on the Feldenkrais Method® (FM), the author elucidates how this trans-disciplinary dialogue offers a bio-psycho-social model of critical artistic inquiry. By leaning on choreographic research 'Body/Soma/Self' and artistic play undertaken between 2004 and 2011, the essay gives an insight into the development of FM-informed performance-making practices. The author discusses creative process development from a practitioner perspective while offering contextual debate with reference to the fields of 'Release' (O'Donnell 2010) and 'Social Choreography' (Hewitt 2005; Klien 2009). By placing FM in the context of performance-making, this article aims to make a distinct contribution to the emerging field of 'somatic-informed' choreographic practices (Brown 2011). The author explicates how Feldenkrais-informed interventions offer the development of preparatory processes, kinaesthetic tuning scores, choreographic vocabulary development and choreographic structuring strategies. The transfer of the Feldenkrais Method into performance-making—a process-of-enquiry within a process-of-enquiry—is discussed as a complex system involving a large number of interacting agents, allowing for conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity, and emergent nonlinear causalities while offering an empowering corporeal tool for process-participants.

The essay also discusses how the Feldenkrais Method offers micro-choreographic processes to offer creative modalities of self-inquiry through the combination of application of de-familiarisation devices, logic in compositional structuring of lessons, and the use of touch and verbal instruction. The article indicates how the use of FM as an intersubjective tool for choreographic intervention can support shared decision-making processes. Within such context, the role of the choreographer is understood as facilitator of conditions for co-creation and an 'embodied choreographic questioning' (Kampe 2013), which supports alternatives to the 'myth of the lone genius of the artist' (Montuori 2011) as a contemporary mode of choreographic enquiry and production.

### **Keywords**

somatic practices, choreographic practice, Release Technique, collaborative arts practice, social choreography, Feldenkrais Method

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**Please cite:** (First published in the) *Feldenkrais Research Journal*, volume 5; 2016.

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## **'crossing/weaving': somatic interventions in choreographic practices**

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This essay aims to expose how collaborative choreographic processes can be informed through somatic educational practices. Focusing on the Feldenkrais Method®, a key 20<sup>th</sup> century system of somatic movement education, this essay elucidates how this trans-disciplinary dialogue offers a bio-psycho-social model of artistic inquiry. While there is a fair amount of literature on the application of Feldenkrais Method within dance education and training (Fortin, Vieyra, and Tremblay 2009; Fortin, Long, and Lord 2002; Long 2002), little has been written about its application in choreographic contexts (Kampe 2010; Münker 2010). More so, it is the non-goal-oriented and subjective orientation of the Feldenkrais Method, concerned with the recognition of the emergent and malleable human being in 'co-dependent interaction with the outer world' (Reese 1985), that aligns the aims of this essay with an increasing trend in dance scholarship concerned with the study of the construction, performance, and analysis of embodied processes within choreographic culture<sup>1</sup>. Susan Melrose suggests that, rather than analysing product, dance scholars 'should be enquiring about the making of work' (2008). Dance-maker Emilyn Claid argues further that, within collaborative performing arts contexts, 'its processes, not its products, have the power to shift cultural practice' (2006:124). In line with this position, the focus of the performative projects discussed in this essay has been on the probing of innovative processes of performance-making and their relationship to emerging product and agency of the participant. I aim to articulate and disseminate through writing how somatic-informed processes and participants' responses form parts of emancipatory and collaborative dance-making practices that rely on organic feedback loops between choreographic facilitators and performers.

By leaning on my choreographic research project *Body/Soma/Self*, undertaken between 2004 and 2010, this essay gives an insight into the use of Feldenkrais Method-informed processes to facilitate performance-making practices. By drawing on the educational practices of physicist Moshe Feldenkrais (1904–1984), this choreographic research project aimed to extend the boundaries of choreographic processing towards a trans-disciplinary performance practice that

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<sup>1</sup> I presented the main ideas of this essay as an academic paper at the symposium 'Performing Process – Sharing Practice' at the Centre for Dance Research (CeDARE) of Coventry University, UK on June 6, 2014.

makes a distinct contribution to the emerging field of ‘somatic-informed’ choreographic practices ‘that recognize the emergent dancing subject as a feature of the work’ (Brown 2011:71).

In this essay, I examine how Feldenkrais-informed somatic interventions can serve as preparatory processes and *kinaesthetic-tuning scores* and can aid choreographic vocabulary development and structuring strategies through corporeal modes of interaction with the social world. I strive to illuminate how a choreographic wrestling with limitations inherent in the Feldenkrais Method, mainly in its introspective slow attending, serves as starting point for a ‘testing of the extreme’ (Rywerant 2001) that uses modes of disorientation as a choreographic stance. I propose that Feldenkrais-informed choreographic practices foster a complicit ‘somatic authority’ (Green 2001) by supporting shared decision-making processes through an underlying ‘embodied choreographic questioning’ (Kampe 2014). Feldenkrais’ autopoietic model of a person as an environmentally embedded and emergent social organism, and his non-corrective and anti-totalitarian stance towards embodied questioning as a ‘principle of no principles’ (1981), are discussed in performance-making contexts as dynamic systems processes that allow for enquiry and communication. I examine the uses of verbal instruction, questioning, and non-corrective touch interactions inherent in the Feldenkrais Method as emancipatory technologies within creative processes. The essay draws on research participant feedback, discusses choreographic process development from a practitioner perspective, and offers a contextual debate by drawing on the process-oriented writings of choreographic pioneer Mary O’Donnell and more recent discussions on the emancipatory dimensions of choreographic process inquiry (Clarke in DeLahunta et al. 2011; Klein 2011; Klien 2009; Martin 2009).

### **Choreographic process, agency and world-making**

‘Perhaps art as such will have no objects.’ (Marcuse 2007:111)

Emerging from mid-twentieth century US and European dance cultures, there has been a trend in choreographic practice and research that privileges the inquiry into the process-based nature of choreographic practices over notions of product and spectacle. Such a paradigm shift aimed to challenge modes of participation within dance creation and reception processes. In the US, departing mainly from the non-determinist work of Merce Cunningham, the task-based choreographies of the Judson Dance Theatre, and the improvisational dance-theatre experiments of West Coast dance-pioneer Anna Halprin, a trend towards process-based practice emerged where participation in and witnessing of the creation process form part of the aesthetics of the emerging artistic product. This has manifested in the improvisational performances of *Grand Union* (1970–1976), the collective formed by members of The Judson Dance Theatre, and the emergence of Contact Improvisation through the work of Steve Paxton (1972), but also in a growing interest in *Open Form Composition* as a choreographic modality, which, according to US dance-maker Mary O’Donnell, could serve as a vessel for a ‘new aesthetic, based in actual, real-gestural and process-based works’ (O’Donnell 2010:8).

O'Donnell, who influenced a generation of current European dance-makers through her directorial work at The School for New Dance Development (SNDO) in Amsterdam (between 1987–89) and the European Dance Development Centre (EDDC) in Arnhem and Düsseldorf (between 1989–2001), had participated in the first Contact Improvisation showings in the Weber Gallery in 1972. Inspired by the process-based *open form* practices developed by composer Earle Brown in the 1950s, she developed her choreographic practices in the US between the late 1960s and early 1970s with her company (Tropical Fruit Company) before moving to Europe in 1973. O'Donnell discusses her interest in developing task-based choreographic strategies which would enhance a non-determinism and fluidity in form, while emphasising the potential for the integration of the dancers' capacity for choice-making within choreographic devising and performance processes:

‘Open Form’ to me then meant ‘sequenced, (in the sense of ordered in time), process-based’ forms where choice-making of dancers was based on their own intuition, judgment, and abilities. (O'Donnell 2010:7)

O'Donnell's work was seminal for the development of UK *New Dance*, initially through her work at Dartington College of Arts in the UK between 1974 and 1987, where she was instrumental in re-visioning the practice and study of dance as a critical process in which questions of personal and societal relevance became questions of choreographic interrogation. She further disseminated an ethos toward process-based making and performance through her practice and theorization of the emerging approach to dance development she termed *Release*, ‘an extended scientific and philosophical inquiry’ and vessel for creative transformation (2010:4). Her commitment to the dissemination of Contact Improvisation in collaboration with pioneer practitioners such as Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark-Smith, Daniel Lepkov, and Lisa Nelson and her collaboration with members of the X6 Collective, was instrumental in forging the UK *New Dance* idiom as, to quote dance-maker Emilyn Claid, ‘a practice of liberation’ (2006:131), and her work influenced numerous emerging dance artists of the period.

O'Donnell articulates her vision of dance as a trans-disciplinary ‘platform for the exploration of societal ethics, with the training and management of individual responsibility and freedom being the basis’ (2010:12). Such reasoning, where the critical application of choreographic processes is understood as emancipatory practice towards a democratisation of the dance-making culture, echoes current trans-disciplinary tendencies in dance scholarship towards *Social Choreography* (Hewitt 2005, Klein and Noeth 2011, Monni 2010), which aims ‘to open the disciplines of choreography and dance to other fields of human knowledge production’ (Klien 2009:5), and my own practice-led research that this chapter discusses. Dance sociologists Gabriele Klein (2011) and the late Randy Martin (2009) and choreographer Michael Klien (2009) argue that a main cultural contribution of dance practice lies within the development of new embodied models of social governance. Gabriele Klein and Sandra Noeth (2011) contend that:

dance reveals its effectivity not in the representation of existing structures and systems, but unfolds its potentiality precisely in the offering of

alternatives, [...] developed with the help of the body and through the organization of movement. (2011:9)

These authors propose a scholarship concerned with inquiring ‘how dance creates “world” as a medium bound to the body’ (2011:9). Developing a capacity of world-making or self-creation through reflective embodied practices is at the heart of the Feldenkrais Method, which, I suggest, uses choreographic processes to empower the learner for autonomous choice-making and new ways of interacting with the world.

### **The Feldenkrais Method: Embodiment and choreographic becoming**

The Feldenkrais Method was developed by Judoka and physicist Moshe Feldenkrais, DSc, (1904–1984), between the 1940s and 1980s, as ‘an approach to working with people, which expands their repertoire of movements, enhances awareness, improves function and enables people to express themselves more fully.’ (International Feldenkrais Federation 1994). It is applied within contexts of rehabilitation, sports, and increasingly within the performing arts, and forms part of the widening field of *Somatics*, posited by Thomas Hanna as ‘the art and science of the inner relational process between awareness, biological function, and environment, all three factors being understood as a synergetic whole’ (1985:1). Feldenkrais developed his work in response to Freud and Pavlov, in dialogue with leading twentieth-century body-learning pioneers and systems-scientists. His work, which places learning at the heart of the human condition, is recognised within current research on *neuroplasticity* (Merzenich 2013; Doidge 2015), and *enactive cognition* (Varela 1995, Noë 2009).

The Feldenkrais Method makes use of two interrelated approaches, Awareness Through Movement® (ATM®) and Functional Integration® (FI®). While ATM lessons are facilitated in groups, FI hands-on interventions happen on a one-to-one, non-verbal level. ATM lessons are led through verbal instruction and questions. Feldenkrais clarifies his use of verbal instruction as a mode of facilitating an embodied and ‘ecologized thinking’ (Morin and Kern 1999):

In my lessons the student learns to listen to the instruction while he is actually carrying out an exercise and to make the necessary adjustments without stopping the movement itself. In this way he learns to act while he thinks and to think while he acts. (1992:60)

ATM lessons can be understood as detailed educational micro-choreographies. The ATM teacher facilitates conditions from which ‘awareness’ can be cultivated through the use of compositional devices, disorientation strategies, and de-familiarisation processes. Lessons use repetition, theme and variation, rondo forms, reversal, differentiation, and constraint in order to stimulate the learner’s curiosity and develop capacity for the questioning of habitual patterns of behaviour and thinking. Feldenkrais uses processes of de-patterning and re-patterning of habitual movement to construct a self-reflective and creative potential in the mature learner. For Feldenkrais, maturity ‘is the capacity of the individual to break up total situations of previous

experience into parts, to reform them into a pattern most suitable to the present circumstances' (2005:196).

Feldenkrais aims to facilitate learning processes through defamiliarisation strategies, first theorised by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovski (1893–1984) in his essay 'Art as Technique' (1917). Shklovski, like Feldenkrais, was concerned with habituation of perception and behaviour and saw the main function of art as to challenge habituation:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the length and difficulty of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Shklovski 1917:12)

Similarly, Feldenkrais proposes an aesthetic experience to the participant/learner that makes use of this 'making strange' to heighten sensory-motor awareness and capacities while stimulating critical reflection on the organisation and construction of embodied knowledge. Feldenkrais states that an important feature of the group work is the continued novelty of situation that is maintained throughout the course. 'Once the novelty wears off, awareness is dulled and no learning takes place. If a configuration needs repetition, I teach it in tens and even hundreds of variations until they are mastered' (2010:37). Shelhav (2003) emphasises the relevance of compositional aspects of the ATM lessons and suggests that each lesson has a

logical structure and is like a work of art. It is hoped that the teacher and student alike, through the medium of the lesson, will have a sensual-emotional-thoughtful experience [...]. The components of the lessons become clear, its hidden layers and logical structure become obvious in this way, the logical structure can foster logical thinking. (Shelhav and Golomb 2003:ii)

Within somatic movement practices, the Feldenkrais Method finds a unique signature through the combination of application of de-familiarisation devices, logic in compositional structuring of lessons, and the use of verbal instruction.

Functional Integration is an empathetic touch-based dialogue that allows the learner to discover new and pleasurable sensory experiences and movement possibilities. Feldenkrais radically challenges notions of the isolated individual by proposing that, through touch, boundaries between self and other can be both suspended and clarified. He suggests that 'through touch, two persons, the toucher and the touched, can become a new ensemble [...] a new entity' (Feldenkrais in Ginsburg 2010:267). Modes of interaction inherent in the Feldenkrais Method rely on honing into intersubjective processes of mutual learning through coupling with peers and environment, to be understood as 'dancing together' (Feldenkrais in Goldfarb 1990).

## Transfer and becoming

The title of this essay refers to choreographic research projects undertaken in 2006 and 2009 as part of the *Body/Soma/Self* cycle at The Facility: Performance as Research Centre of London Metropolitan University. *Crossing* (2006), a collaboration with dance-makers Colin Poole, Lizzie Lequesne, and composer Mark Horrocks that aimed to explore strategies of transcending pre-expressive educational propositions within the Feldenkrais Method towards highly dynamic, impulsive, and visceral performance modes. *Weave* (2009), a week of shared Feldenkrais-informed choreographic interventions, investigated how psychosocial dimensions of the Feldenkrais Method can support decision-making processes within choreographic interrogations. This project was designed as an exchange between UK-based Feldenkrais practitioners and somatic-informed dance-makers.

*Body/Soma/Self* (2004–2009) was comprised of a series of choreographic laboratory projects – *Chaser* (2004), *trace/reverse* (2005), *Crossing* (2006), *Weave* (2009) – which were driven by emergent and developmental aims and questions. These projects focussed on studio-based practice, debate, peer-exchange, and documentation processes.<sup>2</sup> The project formed part of my practice-led PhD ‘The Art of Making Choices: The Feldenkrais Method as a Choreographic Resource’ (Kampe 2013), which was bookended by two professional productions. *Urbane Rituale* (2003), a site-specific choreographic collaboration with a cast of 150 performers created with *Tanzinitiative Hamburg* in Germany, and the play *The Dybbuk* (2010), co-directed with writer Julia Pascal and presented in New York City, tested the integration of the Feldenkrais Method into professional performance-making contexts.

During the research period of *Body/Soma/Self*, the nature of questions asked shifted from questions regarding the transfer and development of *movement vocabularies* (*Chaser*) and *structuring devices* (*trace/reverse*) from Feldenkrais Method to performance-making processes, to questions going beyond movement, concerned with *accesing and enhancing the affective capacities of performers* (*Crossing*), and with *processes that support capacities for judgement and choice-making* (*Weave*) within performance-making processes.

The final project, *The Dybbuk*, was a professional testing ground for further extending and manifesting of the results of the research into the Feldenkrais Method as a choreographic resource. The development process of the piece involved a three-week period of working with an ensemble of actors in daily laboratory-sessions. I also worked in collaboration with co-director Julia Pascal on integrating text-based work, movement-based practices, and choreographic interactions with objects and set. This co-rehearsal continued for the first week of the run of the

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<sup>2</sup> All laboratory projects were undertaken and presented through public performances in collaboration with academic and professional partners including (The Facility – the PaR Unit London Metropolitan University, The Feldenkrais Guild of Germany, Chisenhale Dance Space London), and conducted with expert somatic practitioners and dance-makers as co-researchers, including Feldenkrais, Body-Mind Centering™, and Pilates practitioners.

project. Drawing on research undertaken in *Body/Soma/Self*, the rehearsal process included an *application of a questioning approach* allowing for trial and error, even during the run of the play. Collaborator Julia Pascal describes the intra- and inter-subjective nature of the questioning that emerged within the Feldenkrais-informed rehearsal processes where the embodied and felt intelligence of the performer becomes a dynamic resource in the creation process:

In rehearsal, you are constantly encouraging us to ask questions; you are verbalizing all the time—how does this feel? You are synthesizing the body-mind by the fact of questioning. ‘Why are you doing this? What do you want from this person? What do you want from yourself?’

Without that you don't have a movement that works, that has any intelligence behind it. What is the action and how do I show my inner feeling through action? It is always about action, it's not about thought, but of course thought and action are completely connected; what is the physical action, where is it coming from? In our rehearsals this seems to be now symbiotically connected. (Pascal in conversation with Kampe 2010)

## Facilitating co-creation

Pascal (2010) suggests that such non-dualist process is an ‘opening [...] you are always opening; opening new rooms in the house, opening new doors, opening new experiences.’ Feldenkrais practices rely on coupling processes where sociality is constructed through the interaction of flexible communicative partners. Within such context the role of the choreographer is understood predominantly as facilitator of conditions for co-creation. This includes the facilitating of conditions for awareness and ‘self-eco-reorganisation’ (Morin 2007) of individual performers, allowing for flexibility, openness, and curiosity through movement. It also means a facilitating of conditions for the ‘necessary encounter with the unfamiliar’ (Mumford and Garde 2011) through interactions of ensemble members, with a focus on the generation and development of movement material through individual performers and ensemble. The providing of time for shared periods of debate and reflection, as developed during laboratory projects, strengthened conditions for ‘complicity’ amongst collaborators. Negotiating the role of the choreographer as a ‘facilitator of a choreographic environment’ formed part of a learning process between participants. Through the development of FM-informed rehearsal modalities, the *facilitating and social choreographing* of such collaborative learning became an integral part of the artistic input and output of the choreographic process.

My research suggests that a transfer of FI touch modalities to interaction of participants through improvisation enhances the organic potential for social exchange of sensory insights inherent in the Feldenkrais Method as a base for performance making. Research participant Simeon Perlin in *The Dybbuk* suggested that the transfer of touch interactions into partner work and improvisational scores may develop empathy, communication skills, and trust amongst the performers, ‘as a platform from which to build, a physical common code’ (Perlin in conversation

with Kampe 2010). Such processes of transfer included an introducing of FI-based touch interactions as a mode of non-verbal communication between choreographic facilitator and performers, providing sensory stimulation, pattern clarification, and a psycho-physical modality of ‘support’ (Rywerant 2001). Perlin commented on the non-corrective quality of touch-interaction emerging from Feldenkrais-informed processes:

You never once pushed me to do something that I’ve not wanted to do. In other movement practises I’ve felt hands on me trying to push areas that don’t want to be pushed, whereas with this you have the freedom to discover your body in a way that is comfortable for you...it’s not forced. (Perlin 2010)

The choreographic processes also extensively tested modalities of sharing of such touch explorations with ensemble/research participants as a mode of dialoguing and transfer into movement exploration, fostering a haptic collaboration between performers. The research probed the transfer of the listening and guiding quality of hands-on FI modalities into creative processes. This transfer explored the shifting of touch interaction from *hands-on-torso* touch to *torso-to-torso* touch and dialogue as resource for collaborative movement generation. It also broadened the dynamics of touch interaction from ‘yielding’ qualities to forceful ‘fighting’ qualities, and introduced notions of ‘resistance as choice’ while maintaining a shared awareness.

## Dialogic bodies

This research identifies a dialogic body as resource for performance investigation. While the Feldenkrais Method focuses on neuro-muscular-skeletal organisation, the corporeal organisation proposed has no fixed centre, but is part of an ecological system that is reflected in a ‘functional unity between body, mind, and environment’ (Feldenkrais 2005:149). Such de-centralised body places a dialogic between awareness and adaptability as its potent core. While aiming for free flow in joint articulation and an articulate ‘culture of pelvis and hip joints’ (Feldenkrais 2005), Feldenkrais lessons play with the differentiating and varying of kinetic-chains to allow for complexity, poly-centricity, and omni-directionality in possible movement range. Such differentiating includes a testing, shifting, and reversal of places of movement initiation, and the isolation and re-connection of body-areas in relation to a larger function. Lessons are distinctly designed to highlight relationships in timing, space, and shaping between articulated areas in the mover. This relational testing encourages the learner to develop an understanding of the interplay between stability- and mobility-providing corporeal organisation in relation to environment and ground.

Throughout this project, a body-coding emerged that abandons a *stable core* for *core mobility* in the mover, in which potentials for adaptability are seen as a resource for creativity. Batson (2008) suggests that dominant Western dance aesthetics privilege *core stability* and verticality of alignment where the *axial-skeleton* is understood as centralising anchor supporting the actions of *distal areas* of the human body. Feldenkrais challenges this Cartesian model of

alignment by asking the mover to constantly shift place of movement initiation and by offering movement explorations where *joint-order* relationship of stability and mobility are varied and reversed. This *proximal-distal-reversal* strategy, embedded in both ATM and FI practices, was used extensively during the creation of all projects.

Dance-maker Adi Lerer (*Weave* 2010) reflects upon the relational aspect of the Feldenkrais-informed body-coding as an empowering experience that affected her capacity for choice-making:

The Feldenkrais sessions gave me a strong sense of awareness of the relationship of different parts of my body and their connectedness, the restrictive flow of everyday habits, and how through the practice I can become aware again of the choices I have and my habits. [...] I am being reminded of something that is already ingrained in us, the placement of different limbs, muscles, joints and bones, what they are capable of, which then enabled me to make decisions of how to move. If I will move this part or put weight on this part, how will it affect the other parts in my body? It was a very liberating experience. (Lerer in Kampe 2010:50)

While emerging vocabularies within this project may seem similar to other 20<sup>th</sup> century dance-movement vocabularies, the way the performer is invited into the reflective process of 'embodied analysis' (Kampe 2010) makes the Feldenkrais approach to movement development distinct. The dancers' decision-making processes are an integral part of the dance language. Bodies are not understood as texts, but as readers. Performers are not asked to instrumentalise their bodies, but are becoming players. While spatiality of movement organisation within Feldenkrais lessons is self-referential, it is linked to an intentional relationship between mover and environment. Rather than being concerned with theatrical codes of presentation or representation, the Feldenkrais Method also privileges a 'slower ontology that challenges the Western capitalized view that prioritizes "more and faster" ideologies' (Wood 2011), offering a limited dynamic and spatial range as a working position. The Feldenkrais Method privileges a 'yielding' or 'indulging' dynamic quality by encouraging participants to reduce speed, resistance to gravity and force, and scale of movement, while allowing for connectivity with the ground.<sup>3</sup> Such 'slowing down' and yielding allows participants to align heightened perception with fine-tuned action. Consequently, movers are invited to connect intentionality with action.

The impact of such psycho-physical connectivity within performance contexts was described by research participants as awareness enhancing:

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<sup>3</sup> I am using terminology based on Laban, and post-Laban practices such as LMA, Bartenieff Fundamentals™, and Body-Mind Centering™ to describe the complexity of dynamic and spatial movement organisation. 'Yielding' or 'indulging' refers here to a non-resistant relationship to the dynamic qualities of weight (force), space, time, and flow (Longstaff 2004). Hackney (1998) uses the term 'yielding' to articulate an active giving into gravity to connect with the ground rather than resisting it.

The movements are so gentle and bring you back into yourself, but not only into yourself, it makes you aware of first of all your center and then you open out; and everything is quite gentle, so it's very specific; no movement is gratuitous. So it helps to focus. (Dante in conversation with Kampe and Perlin 2010)

More so, performers identified a relationship between a heightened proprioception and a readiness for action:

You become aware of parts of your body moving, particularly the feeling or the sensations of it. [...] You are more active [...] a performer should be active at all points. (Karsberg in conversation with Kampe and Sykes 2010)

Performer Adi Lerer described this emerging readiness for action as empowering to choice-making in movement design or performance. She suggests that a psycho-physical agency emerging through Feldenkrais processes fosters

[...] more control of the decisions of how and when to move, and if I move this part, what will I project, what will my body say to the audience? (Lerer in Kampe 2010:50)

Actor Simeon Perlin suggested that this dialogic embodied agency can serve as a resource for affective action, where 'movement is impacting emotion [...] movement infers emotion' (Perlin in Kampe 2011).

The choreographic research identifies a synergistic relationship between the omni-directional and relational core mobility as prioritized within Feldenkrais practices, the emphasis on free flow, slowing down, and lightness as dynamic modes of investigation, and the emerging capacity for choice-making, affective presence, and expressivity of performers in rehearsal and performance.

## **Transfer as extending**

This choreographic research probed practical modes of knowledge-transfer as an extending – dynamically, spatially, contextually, and socially – of Feldenkrais Method modalities through artistic processing. It acknowledges that the Feldenkrais Method developed as an emergent hybrid form from its inception and is never applied in a neutral context; rehearsal participants, including myself, inevitably bring their own micro-narratives and needs into a necessarily complex and contaminated process. Dance-maker Lerer comments on the effects of the organic transfer of Feldenkrais Method to dance-making strategies:

One session we worked on the eyes. We explored the mental and physical effect this work had on the whole body, and we inquired the relationship between what we envisaged to what is there in reality. In another session we worked on breath. I

then took those specific elements and decided to work for a while on those different aspects in my piece – just being led by my eyes or the breath and what does it express. (Lerer in Kampe 2010:50)

The project identified the following recurring modes of transfer:

**The use of the Feldenkrais Method as *preparatory-practice*,** challenging visual perception as privileged mode of process engagement through the combination of verbal instruction and questioning in ATM, and haptic dialogues as found in FI, with eyes-closed reception of process participants. The results of such preparatory-practice, organically and un-directed, ‘bled into rehearsal and performance’ (Perlin 2010). Research-participant Rachel VonMoos commented on the *non-linear effect* of such preparatory practice on the process of dance-making within the project *Weave* (2009):

I felt a strong readiness to enter my own work [...] Connecting the morning experience with the solo I was making in the afternoon was a very inspiring aspect for my creative process. During sessions ideas/images would come up, structures for explorations, [...] all these to be ‘used’ in the afternoon. I worked with some of the ‘instructions’ as restriction, not achieving the goal (VonMoos in Kampe 2010:49).

***The extending of the Feldenkrais Method – educational modalities as modes of inquiry into rehearsal and performance practice:*** This included the use of ATM and FI as *Kinaesthetic Tuning Scores* as direct resource for movement generation. Here, the facilitator provided topics/functions investigated through the Feldenkrais Method to be transferred into performance investigations. Performers were given time immediately after ATM practice to explore modes of enquiry and of emergent, unfamiliar, movement patterns within improvisational contexts; minimal verbal intervention allowed for a foregrounding of kinaesthetic experience as resource for enquiry. It also entailed the transfer of modes of *verbal instruction* into improvisational and editorial processes, e.g. use of suggestion, imagery, and metaphor, reframing, pacing, and modelling, and through the use of questioning.<sup>4</sup> Such verbal instruction is understood as performative and includes intention and tone of voice of the speaker. Throughout all projects an *instructing through questioning* was applied as reoccurring strategy. By taking the role of questioner, the choreographer facilitates an environment for inquiry and at the same time subverts traditional hierarchies within the choreographic process, allowing for not-knowing and collaborative processes of ‘finding’. Choreographer and performers become ‘co-enquirers’ (Igweonu 2010). Actor Simeon Perlin identified ‘a strategy of what if?’ as emerging mode of self-questioning within editorial and performance practice:

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<sup>4</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on the use of language in the work of Moshe Feldenkrais see Reese (1985).

What happens if I do it as if one arm is lighter than the other, or if I'm terrified and my body is tight and constricted, what happens to my voice, what happens to my intention? (Perlin in conversation with Kampe and Dante 2010)

The transfer of *problem-setting and solving* processes into improvisation and movement generation included the setting and letting go of *physical constraints* to allow for discovery of non-habitual movement choices. Dance-maker Karin Fisher-Potisk comments:

It invites us to find a way around restriction, usually by freeing up another part, allowing something else to move or take over [...]. This became very clear for me, i.e. when placing one hand on the head – the head became a much more active limb (Fisher-Potisk in Kampe 2010:48)

This ‘holding on to the head’ literally blocks the use of the neck, disturbs habitual self-use, and thus asks movers to activate their ribs in relation to head movements in unfamiliar ways.

The use of *touch interactions*, as used in FI practice, involves haptic dialogues of listening, following, guiding, and manipulation. Like verbal instruction, pacing, modelling, reframing and questioning, these dialogues become non-corrective and holographic modalities that can shift focus from ‘detailed’ inquiry to ‘global’ whole-body touch dialogues.

### **The choreographic subject**

This research suggests that the movement-led educational practices developed by Moshe Feldenkrais are deliberately choreographic<sup>5</sup>. If, for choreographer Michael Klien, choreography itself is proposed as an aesthetics – ‘*a sensitive knowing*’ (2009:99), the facilitation of such sensitive knowing, which is at the heart of Feldenkrais’ concerns, must be understood as a choreographic process. ‘The Art of Making Choices’ probed how Feldenkrais provides a sophisticated choreographic toolkit for becoming articulate of a non-verbal thinking, through processes that combine embodied analysis and verbally-led assisted enquiry. Feldenkrais’ quest for an embodied self-education towards ‘mature behaviour’ (2005) of the individual is from its outset concerned with a re-education of gravity responses within the adult learner:

This is the beginning of consciousness; learning to recognize how our bodies are oriented we come to know ourselves. Subjective and objective realities are thus organically dependent on the motor elements [...] which are oriented by and react to the gravitational field. (2010:33)

To foster such getting in touch with how we orient ourselves in relationship to gravity and world, Feldenkrais developed a highly structured movement-led practice that provides learners with

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<sup>5</sup> Moshe Feldenkrais referred to his lessons as compositions in movement: ‘I have created about ten thousand hours and recorded thirty variations in each one. In other words, I have composed more music than Beethoven and Bach together.’ (Feldenkrais 2010:88)

'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' (2010:88). Feldenkrais referred to such non-verbal thinking with images, patterns and connections, inferred through movement, as a 'thinking with the elements of thinking' (88). Such embodied, patterned, imaged, connective, and divergent thinking can be posited as *choreographic thinking*, or as the choreographic per se. The Feldenkrais Method thus renders the choreographic as a lived and emergent learning process, understood by Klien (2009) as 'the very source of knowledge'. Klien argues, in line with a Feldenkraisian epistemology, that 'the perception of patterns, relations and their dynamics, the integration to existing knowledge, and the creative application to a wider reality, all together constitute the choreographic act' (2009:100).

The role of the facilitator in the Feldenkrais Method is to provide embodied contexts for '*gestural "I can's"*' (Noland 2009), which lead the participant into an emerging choreographic agency. Pascal describes this process:

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 [...] That questioning which transmutes into a body change allows the person to widen and realize they are capable of much more. (Pascal in conversation with Kampe 2010)

Ideally, the facilitator in the Feldenkrais Method aims to provide conditions that enable participants to differentiate and realign relationships between *cultural efficacy, physiological efficiency, and self-efficacy* through felt subjective experience (Bandura 1994). Both ATM and FI are designed to ask questions through multi-modal movement-based processes, aiming to support the awareness of an *intra-subjective, inter-subjective, and trans-subjective* reflective agent-self. Such multi-dimensional agency, understood as in-process, allows the participant to make choices from within, regarding:

- *internal psycho-physical self-organisation*

The Feldenkrais sessions gave me a strong sense of awareness of the relationship of different parts of my body and their connectedness. (Lerer in Kampe 2010:49)

- *relationship towards the environment*

Feldenkrais helped me get a new and special sense of my body and its relationship to the world. My work is all about this [...] It involves a process of going over and over, smudging and exploring and repeating until the precise form emerges. And the sources are body and the world. (LeQuesne in Kampe 2010:50)

- *a shared functionality and materiality that goes beyond individual uniqueness*

The Feldenkrais Method gave me a connection to the poetry of movement and its pure functionality, which I work with. It interests me to be a real person on stage' (VonMoss in Kampe 2010:49)

Relational and environmentally embedded, this enacted questioning regarding a 'whole self' asked through Feldenkrais Method practices is concerned with:

*What, right now, during or after Feldenkrais Method practice, does it feel like to be myself?*

*How am I engaging with the world?*

*How could I engage differently with world?*

*How can I modulate my interaction with the world so that it feels the way I want it to feel?*

### **The critical subject**

'I have a problem setting any material today. Some things are beyond reason – I only want to explore more'.<sup>6</sup>

This research project acknowledges the self-constitutive and critical potential of the Feldenkrais Method practices probed within performance-making contexts. It also acknowledges the emergent, de-centred, de-stabilised position of the subject within the process. Such respectful acknowledgement of the self-in-process is at the heart of the ethos and potential of this project. As a choreographer/person, I am not working with abstract movement or complex systems, but working as a person, with people – and for people. Such a position acknowledges mutual agency-in-process, empathy, desire, communication, vulnerability, and compassion. It enhances Klein's (2011) claim for a *subject-constitutive potential of dance* by transposing Feldenkrais Method processes and nature of questions as introduced above into rehearsal and performance praxis:

*we move and improvise attuned to ourselves through Feldenkrais Method processes*

*we ask questions regarding our 'whole selves':*

*who are we?*

*how are we relating to our environment?*

*what do we want?*

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<sup>6</sup> Dance-maker Alenka Herman, research participant in project Weave (2009), cited in Kampe 2010:49.

*what do we desire?*

*we move*

*who are we now, while and after moving?*

*who are we now, through moving?*

Feeding questions regarding self-efficacy into rehearsal processes has been a key strategy developed throughout this project. Asking Feldenkrais-inspired questions during rehearsal-practice has affected *kinaesthetic-affective feedback loops* within the artistic dialogue. Choreographer Alenka Herman illuminates her self-questioning:

I went on a journey [...] I could feel so clearly the difference on two sides of the body. Who lives here? This was the question that stayed with me for a long time [...] I realised and could feel how emotions, habits and tensions stay in the body, how much power they have to transform. There is a lot of work in undoing.

(Herman in Kampe 2010:49)

Processes of de-patterning, though introduced through playful questioning as a Feldenkrais Method modality and allowing a possibility for re-patterning and re-integration of new knowledge into enworlded functions, can, or must, provoke crises of self-image and ‘of knowledge and skills’ (Martin 2009). Allowing for a *space for crisis* – a ‘Krisenraum’ (Klein 2011) – and ambiguity has been part of the choreographic practice cultivated and fertilized throughout this project. In her reflections on her creation process in *Weave*, dance-maker Katsura Isobe describes a feeling of ‘less fear towards the unknown’ as the effect of working with ATM lessons prior to rehearsal. Such fearlessness emerged from a place of confusion and crisis:

During most of time in ATM sessions, I was struggling. I was struggling to understand what the instruction was, to find out how I wanted to move with which part of body, and to draw a conclusion from what I experienced. I wanted to make sense.

I really could not let it go in ATM sessions (which I found easier in FI sessions since I was completely passive), but the sessions took me to some mental space where I don’t go normally, where I felt calm or almost empty; things were much simpler and there were no need of words to explain. A vast open space, it was.

The Feldenkrais Method definitely encouraged us to listen to our intuition, and that was the crucial approach we took for our artistic practice [...]. Now and then I ask myself a question: what is dance about? What does dance deal with? The experience during *Weave* shows me the answer: you can access to a place where

you otherwise don't access, through the body movement. And this place holds the truth. (Isobe in Kampe 2010)

### **Complex processes: Dances for a sick world**

The transfer of the Feldenkrais Method into performance-making – *a process-of-enquiry within a process-of-enquiry*, is understood as a complex system involving a large number of interacting agents, allowing for conditions for uncertainty, ambiguity, and emergent non-linear causalities. On reflection, my research identifies five areas for transfer within the Feldenkrais Method as relevant for informing choreographic research processes:

**'...Through Movement':** a privileging of movement, understood as relational, as vehicle for knowledge creation, self-awareness, and 'self-imaging' (Beringer 2001).

**'Theory of Reversibility':** Feldenkrais' working proposition, that 'the adherence to one principle to the utter exclusion of the opposite is contrary to the laws of life' (2005:18), allows for an embracing of the paradox between different perspectives of the agents of the artistic process – choreographer, performers, and spectators. Such 'first principle of the Feldenkrais Method being no principle' (Hanna 1980), as a position from which to question the given at any time, underpins strategies and modes of embodiment inherent in the Feldenkrais Method; it provides a context for a subversive methodology of *embodied questioning*.

**'Choreographic Thinking':** Feldenkrais' proposition of non-reductionist thinking 'with images, patterns and connections' (2010:88), constructed through multi-modal teaching processes, can serve as tuning processes which invite participants into choreographic micro-inquiry.

**'Body-Mind-Environment Unity':** Feldenkrais' evolutionary stance on a *whole self*, challenging a humanist centrality of the individual, highlights an inter- and trans-subjective position of the living organism and supports notions of collaboration within creative processes. Such organic perspective underpinning all Feldenkrais practices fosters what sociologist Cornelius Castoriadis coined as 'the paradox of autonomy' – the becoming of a relational and co-dependent being (Castoriadis 2005:314).

**'Working With the Person':** Feldenkrais' insistence on working with the person, not with bodies (2010), and a concern for 'human dignity' (1992), places ethical, political, and spiritual dimensions into the practice which results in a compassionate, empathetic, and non-corrective intersubjective dialogic working mode.

My research into the transfer of the Feldenkrais Method to choreographic processes has resulted in the development of an interrogative 'open systems'<sup>7</sup> approach to performance-making. It supports the late dance-facilitator Gill Clarke's argument that, for

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<sup>7</sup> Cillary (2005) refers to 'open systems' as 'systems that live within a constant exchange with their environment' (Cillary in Birringer and Fenger 2005:121).

dancers as co-creators, somatic competencies such as ‘skills of attention, imagination and curiosity “thought through” the body become tools as essential for the dancer to develop as their physical proficiency’ (Clarke in DeLahunta et al. 2011:249). A key outcome of the project is the development of processes that form *tools for embodied choreographic questioning*, valid for performers, choreographers, and theatre directors alike, which allow the performers to work as *co-creators* ‘with all the power of bodily experience.’<sup>8</sup>

The choreographic research discussed in this essay suggests that the Feldenkrais Method, concerned with questioning habitual perception and behaviour, placed within a choreographic context, can support a ‘new culture of uncertainty’ (Montuori 2007). It can support an open-ended, rigorous, and re-constructive approach to collaborative practice. Feldenkrais’ work and his ideas on embodied self-care in the here and now are close to Randy Martin’s ideas on a contemporary function of dance as a tool for ‘looking at the re-organisation of now’ (2009). It thus offers a model for embodied reconfigurations of a ‘social kinaesthetic’ (Martin 2010) within dance-making processes away from vertical- and core-oriented modes of interaction, towards a pleasurable, de-centralised – and therefore collaborative – organisation.

My original PhD project *The Art of Making Choices: The Feldenkrais Method as a Choreographic Resource* took inspiration from the title of Modernist choreographer Doris Humphrey’s book *The Art of Making Dances* (1987). Humphrey’s manual for choreographic processes was published at a seminal time of crisis within 20<sup>th</sup> century dance culture. New developing modes of presentation and non-determinism beyond representation left Humphrey with uncomfortable conclusions. Emerging late Modernist choreographers were referred to as ‘abdicate their rights to be people, pretending to be objects in space’, leading her to a linear aesthetic logic that ‘a sick world will produce a sick art’ (1987:171). Perhaps a choreographic practice that cultivates a non-verbal thinking, facilitated in an empathetic inter-personal and co-creational quest for ‘human dignity’ (Feldenkrais 2010:68), allowing for questioning the given, as a ‘true rationality [that] is not merely critical, but self-critical’, can produce much-needed dances for a sick world (Morin 1999:129). Such dance or choreographic practice might well be found outside traditional stage settings, within trans-disciplinary contexts and processes that realign the artistic with the everyday through images, patterns, and connections – a shared embodied learning, as facilitated through somatic-informed choreographic processes.

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## **Biography**

Thomas Kampe has worked with dance, theatre and movement for the last 30 years as performer, choreographer, director and educator. He has taught somatic approaches towards movement education and creative practice in different settings around the world. Throughout his career he has coordinated international transdisciplinary initiatives that bridge performing arts, health and education. He currently works at Bath Spa University as Senior Lecturer in Acting Studies. Thomas trained as a visual artist in Kassel, Germany and studied dance at the Laban Centre and at Middlesex University in London where he worked for 13 years with Austrian Ausdruckstanz pioneer and Holocaust survivor Hilde Holger (1905–2011). International artistic collaborations have included artists Liz Aggiss, Laura Belem, Carol Brown, Hilde Holger, Rosemary Lee, Julia Pascal, Colin Poole, German media-arts company ‘Blackhole-Factory’, Tanzinitiative Hamburg and Proforma Dresden. He is a practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method® which forms a foundation for his teaching, research and artistic practice. His most recent publications on Somatics and criticality include the chapter ‘The Art of Making Choices: The Feldenkrais Method as a Soma-Critique’ (Triarchy Press 2015), and ‘Eros and Inquiry – The Feldenkrais Method as a Complex Resource’ (*Theater Dance and Performance Training* 2015). Thomas is currently co-editing journal volumes for *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* and the International Feldenkrais Federation (IFF) *Feldenkrais Research Journal*.