

# Enacting Desire: Constructing Social Flexibility through Somatic-informed Processes

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This paper discusses the facilitation of actor training as a holistic education effected through somatic-informed processes of embodiment. It will draw on applications of the work of Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984), understood as an enactive and ecological model of reflective self-creation through movement, within actor training contexts.

It examines the construction of a Feldenkrais-informed educational practice which draws on Feldenkrais' practices of 'Awareness through Movement' and 'Functional Integration'. In addressing the themes of this conference, this paper considers Doidge's (2015) writings on neuroplasticity which places Feldenkrais' non-dualist practices, within the development of 'flexible minds' (Feldenkrais 2010) and at the forefront of learning approaches that use embodiment as a vessel for transformation of brain functions.

The paper places Feldenkrais as a radical pioneer within the enactivist paradigm, whose practical educational modalities empower learners to access possibilities for 'self-education' (Feldenkrais 1992). This includes a heightened self-awareness and expressive potentiality, and an emerging 'Enactive Social Understanding' (Di Paolo et al 2014:60) of their lived environment. Feldenkrais developed a use of 'self-imagery' (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 in interaction with the material and social environment.

More so, this paper explores the probing of underlying assumptions and principles informing the above practices as modes for an embodied co-creation of the actor as a flexible, relational and desiring social creature. It examines Feldenkrais-specific notions of thoughtful-doing as felt-embodied enquiry, Feldenkrais' use of touch-interaction as a questioning of the cognitive closure of the human being, his 'theory of reversibility' (Feldenkrais 2010), and his eco-proposition of a 'functional unity between body, mind, and environment' (2005:149) - environment understood as a bio-psycho-social structuralisation - as departure points for creative pedagogic inquiry.

Ultimately, this paper argues for a construction of a Feldenkrais-informed practice as a critical, transformative and emancipatory pedagogy which questions hierarchical and reductionist modes of actor training. It suggests that such pedagogy supports a co-enactive process of 'organic learning' (Feldenkrais 1981) that facilitates conditions for shared artistic inquiry.

Performance theorist Gesa Ziemer asserts that such conditions for embodied inquiry 'where linguistic eloquence is being slowed down, where we are disoriented and touched at the same time to perceive something' (2009) are socially transformative and empowering for the participants. In his discussions with Richard Schechner, Feldenkrais (2010[1972]) proposes that such slowing-down enables the actor to engage in 'an awareness of action' which fosters 'greater clarity and ease', a capacity to 'listening to the other person' and the possibility for 'rediscovery', which for Feldenkrais provides the potential towards a bio-psycho-social flexibility and the forming of new behavioural patterns.

The paper suggests that an acquired Feldenkraisian flexibility which includes psycho-social competencies and a heightened ability of a 'learning to learn' (Feldenkrais 2010), supports the student actor in their personal, creative and professional development. The author draws on practice-led research, his own pedagogical practice, and on student-feedback from the BA Acting program at Bath Spa University, while referring to writings by Moshe Feldenkrais, social-theorist Cornelius Castoriadis (2005, 2011) and ecologist Edgar Morin (1999, 2007) - all three informed by the paradigm of Autopoiesis (Varela 1995, 1999).

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