

Interview

The influence of the Feldenkrais Method in the dance work of Mariela Nestora

Which elements of the Feldenkrais method (FM) do you use or integrate in your dance work?

The use of attention and the movement of attention to different body parts is the key element from the FM that I use in the dance work. It is a primary focus when working with the dancers, especially on the performativity of the work.

How does this influence the performativity of the dancers?

When the attention of the dancer shifts to different body parts or to the internal spaces of their body or the spaces between the bodies of the dancers as they move, the quality of the movement becomes affected along with the sensorial experience of the movement itself. This is a different kind of performativity if one compares it, for example, to an extroverted and projected to the audience kind of performing. It is an invitation to the spectator, to engage with a sensorial experience of the movement performed, rather than just observe it.

How do you integrate these elements of the Feldenkrais method (FM) in your dance work? What is your working method?

I start working with improvisation tasks that are also sometimes inspired from the FM method, for example moving more through the skeleton or a task where you keep shifting the attention on your body while you move for example to the skin or the organs. After creating the movement material and organising the movements in time and space I then work on another layer of the score directing the attention of the breathing to different parts of the body within the choreography.

What is typical about your work?

At the moment I am working on what I have termed as *molecular choreography*, developing methodologies that are inspired from basic principles and functions in genetics and applying them onto movement, while at the same time being in dialogue with Gilles Deleuze's notion of the 'molecular' which regards all entities as molecular collectivises. This is my current entry point into my artistic research which is situated within the Post Human and New materialist field.

What are the basic principles and functions in genetics and how do you apply it? Could you explain this a bit more? What is the relation between genetics and movement for you?

The genetic code that makes up all entities is in the form of DNA or RNA sequences which are in turn different combinations of the same elements. Translating this into movement I create sequences that through repetition and variation change in time and space. Mutation is an operation that can produce anything from another species to cancer and I translate this into movement by creating “mutations” within specific sequences that often appear as events within the overall choreography.

Do you also use the principle breathing and how do you use it? Do you use different ways of breathing?

Yes, the principle of breathing is another layer of working with the movement, especially on how the movement is performed. By changing the attention of breath to different parts of the body the quality and resonance of the movement is affected and I make use of that in composing the choreography and working on the dramaturgy of the piece. I collaborate with Anna Pangalou, a vocalist who has developed her own methodology on breathing, so there is a lot of focus on breathing both from her methodology and from the FM.

Are you using different ways of breathing or you use a way of breathing that you send to different body parts? What way of breathing do you use?

We use different ways of breathing in different parts of the dance, focusing for example on the chest, back or head.

By sending the breath to different places in the body, does it also help to release muscle tension?

It is less about releasing muscle tension and more about experiencing the movement differently. Moreover it affects how performers inhabit the pauses between movements.

Could you say more about Anna's breathing method? How does she use it?

Anna works with a detailed visualisation of the skeleton and ways of “sending” the breath to different parts of the bones, the spaces between the bones and directing the pathway of the inbreath and outbreath, as well as the inherent pauses in the breathing in different areas.

Which influence does Feldenkrais have on your dance movements?

There is no direct influence in the movement vocabulary from the FM, yet the ease and flow of the movement is directly affected. It is a valuable tool for rehearsal. I teach a Feldenkrais lesson as part of the warm up practice, selecting the appropriate lesson according to what we will be working on during that day. I sometimes select specific lessons according to what I observe the dancers need to work on in their movement.

Does Feldenkrais help you to move more efficiently?

Yes, and this is true for all students of the method, whether they are dancers, performers, musicians, sports people and people of all ages. It is the first thing that changes when one starts studying the FM and you notice it in your everyday life too.

In what way do you notice that you move more efficiently in dance and in normal life? Could you give some examples of what is more efficient now?

Moving more efficiently includes moving with less pain, less limitations, moving easily and elegantly. One of Moshe Feldenkrais' first students described this as biological joy: feeling good with yourself, your body and enjoying your movement in life. It is no coincidence that many of my students that may have come to the FM with pain and discomfort once they improve and discover new ways to move with ease, they want to start dance lessons. I guess it is a way to celebrate what they feel, the joy of moving with your whole self. You feel confident and ready to act on your desires.

Does Feldenkrais bring you more awareness in your dance movements?

Yes, it does. It brings more awareness in yourself and all the movements you do, performatively or not. As Moshe Feldenkrais said "Movement is life. life is movement" which is so true if one thinks of the first and last movement we all do in our life, which is the movement of breathing.

Do the Feldenkrais principles create more self-awareness?

Yes. You learn more about yourself and you discover changes not only in moving more efficiently, but also on your self-image, in your relationship with space and others and life.

Why did you start to use Feldenkrais and why did you combine it with dance?

I studied Biology, Human Molecular Genetics and Contemporary dance & Choreography. Although I discovered Feldenkrais later in my life, it seemed it was the missing link in my pathway- combining a thorough scientific approach to human movement and the joy of dance. After exploring the FM in my own body and in my dancing, it started influencing my choreographic work at first unconsciously. A few years later, it became apparent, also through teaching workshops on artistic research, that the Feldenkrais method was already embedded in my work.

Can you give an example of a piece that you made where you use Feldenkrais?

The latest productions, **LUCA_T.** and **Discreetly Distinct** are both part of the *molecular choreography* research and use the Feldenkrais method as a tool for rehearsals and the creation of the work.

And how can you see this in your dance work?

I guess you see it in the dancers, but first you see the work itself. Anyhow it is not my aim to render the use of the Feldenkrais method apparent in the creations.

<https://marielanestora.wixsite.com/mariela-nestora>

<https://www.feldenkraiscenter.org/>

*Interview to SienVanderostijne,
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