

Tools for the practice of acting

Julie-Kazuko Rahir

La Manufacture, Haute école des arts de la scène – HES-SO, Lausanne, Switzerland

Contact: juliekazuko.rahir@manufacture.ch / julierahir@yahoo.fr

Abstract

In 2020, I started a research project entitled 'Theatre and Feldenkrais: which tools from the Feldenkrais Method® are most pertinent to an actor's work?' (Rahir 2020). This took place within the framework of La Manufacture's research department as part of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Western Switzerland and in partnership with the Feldenkrais Association of Switzerland, the *Autopoïesis* art school in Montréal and *The Institut de Formation Feldenkrais* – IFELD in Lyon. We indexed different principles contained in the Feldenkrais Method proved to be effective in prompting creative acting. We then attempted to make assumptions about how those principles might be applied on stage in order to determine whether we could turn them into what we henceforth called *tools* for actors.

This article is based on an earlier French version of this paper.

Keywords

acting, actors, Feldenkrais Method, theatre research, tools for actors

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Please cite: (First published in the) *Feldenkrais Research Journal*, volume 7; 2023.

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Tools for the practice of acting¹

Julie-Kazuko Rahir

La Manufacture, Haute école des arts de la scène – HES-SO, Lausanne, Switzerland

Context

In 2020, I carried out research entitled ‘Theatre and Feldenkrais: which tools from the Feldenkrais Method are most pertinent to an actor’s work?’ (Rahir 2020).² This took place within the framework of *La Manufacture*’s research department as part of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Western Switzerland and in partnership with the Feldenkrais Association of Switzerland, the *Autopoïesis* art school in Montréal and IFELD (*Institut de Formation Feldenkrais*) in Lyon. In addition to the many aspects of the Feldenkrais Method inherent to an actor’s sensory experiences – that probably explain why it is often taught in theatre schools, especially in the English-speaking world – I had the intuition that the Feldenkrais Method contains a bountiful reservoir of *tools* providing fresh performance possibilities for actors. I hence wanted to build bridges between my everyday acting practice and my personal somatic experiences.

I began by surveying the opinions of actors and directors who have used the Feldenkrais Method in their creative work. Firstly, this involved reading and using original sources (written by Moshe Feldenkrais and aimed directly at actors) and secondary sources (published articles, books and doctoral theses).³ Secondly, it involved experimenting with recordings of the classes given by Moshe Feldenkrais himself to actors working with the British theatre director Peter Brook.⁴ In addition, this meant complementing writings on actors and the Feldenkrais Method by broadening my bibliography and interviewing three theatre professionals who link their performance practices to the Method: Yoshi Oida, the famous Japanese actor who participated

¹ This article has been translated from French. I would like to thank Meriel Kenley, Performing arts researcher, for her careful reading and corrections. See the French version online : https://www.manufacture.ch/download/docs/gc5jhssy.pdf/Annexe2_Re%CC%81pertoire%20analytique%20des%20outils%20Th%C3%A9%C3%A2tre%20et%20Feldenkrais.pdf

² <http://www.manufacture.ch/fr/4409/Theatre-et-Feldenkrais>

³ The instructive authors of the sources selected in 2019-2020 were Richard Allen Cave, Mara Della Pergola, Odette Guimond, Dianne Hancock, Kene Igweonu, Michael Purcell, Alan Questel, Stuart Seide and Victoria Worsley. See the bibliography available at the following address in the online research directory:

https://www.manufacture.ch/download/docs/emwva3fp.pdf/Annexe1_Bibliographie%20Th%C3%A9%C3%A2tre%20et%20Feldenkrais.pdf

⁴ Feldenkrais, M. ([1973] 2017).

in Moshe Feldenkrais' 1973 workshop at the *Bouffes du Nord* theatre; the French actor, director and Feldenkrais Method practitioner Lionel Gonzalez; and Odette Guimond, an actress, director and Feldenkrais Method practitioner from Montréal.⁵

Insofar as the project's objective involved the everyday practice of actors and their performance, I concentrated on documentary sources originating from theatre professionals who applied the Feldenkrais Method themselves and not Feldenkrais practitioners who taught the Method to actors. Thanks to the study of these sources, I realized there are different ways of applying the Feldenkrais Method to acting. Awareness Through Movement® can be used as a regular warm-up,⁶ collective lessons can be separate from the work on the play,⁷ exercises for actors can be inspired by the Feldenkrais Method⁸ and a theatre practice can be revolutionized by the somatic point of view.⁹

In collaboration with French actor and director Christian Geffroy Schlittler, I subsequently integrated these reflections into our experiment of the theatrical work. We did not focus on the warm-up potentialities of Awareness Through Movement. Our aim instead was to collect principles stemming from the Feldenkrais Method amidst our experiences of Awareness Through Movement and then, being inspired by these principles, to create new theatrical tools.

Together, we indexed different principles contained in the Feldenkrais Method proved to be effective in triggering creative acting. We attempted to make assumptions about how those principles might be applied on stage in order to determine whether we could turn them into what

⁵ Rahir, J-K, 2020. These interviews are available online at:

https://soundcloud.com/recherche_manufacture/theatre-feldenkrais-lionel-gonzalez ;

https://www.manufacture.ch/download/docs/3jq5kdu7.pdf/Th%C3%A9%C3%A2tre_et_Feldenkrais%20Entretien_Yoshi_Oida.pdf ;

https://www.manufacture.ch/download/docs/vn3u7ubh.pdf/Th%C3%A9%C3%A2tre_et_Feldenkrais%20%20Entretien_Odette_Guimond.pdf

⁶ As authors like Richard Allen Cave, Mara Della Pergola, Diane Hancock, Kene Igweonu, and Victoria Worsley demonstrate.

⁷ Some practitioners consider such lessons as being improper to bring a conducive state of acting – the actor becoming over “relaxed” and not “lively” enough (Yoshi Oida), almost flirting with a state of “sleepiness” (Lionel Gonzalez). In these cases, the lessons will either be specifically used with the intention of “cleansing” the actor of their movement habits, but also as a way to acquire a better knowledge of the body in connection with the mind (Yoshi Oida); or be used in the perspective of an unconscious work permeating throughout the entire rehearsal, allowing that “something might happen without the actor thinking of it” (Lionel Gonzalez). See the interviews with Yoshi Oida and Lionel Gonzalez mentioned here above.

⁸ For instance: Victoria Worsley, Odette Guimond, and Alan Questel, as well as the very recent publication from Scott Illingworth (2020).

⁹ I would quote professional theatre makers such as the director Stuart Seide, Odette Guimond, Victoria Worsley, and Alan Questel since the Feldenkrais methodology seems to have permanently influenced their theatrical work. For further information on different uses of the Feldenkrais Method, see the following research report:

<https://www.manufacture.ch/download/docs/wd74d3gf.pdf/Rapport%20d'activite%CC%81%20Th%C3%A9%C3%A2tre%20et%20Feldenkrais%20-%20Phase%20I.pdf>

we henceforth called *tools* for actors. To bring this about, we used our practical understanding of theatre, called upon our diverse acting skills, our memories of rehearsals and performances, and challenged our habits as actors. This also involved observing how the Feldenkrais Method can provide substance to theatrical creativity in the immediacy of rehearsals and performances as well as exactly how this Awareness through Movement can help an actor generate their own creative resources throughout the preparation and interpretation of the actor's score.

As this research continues,¹⁰ an exploration of the range of potential tools is currently underway in collaboration with performers and partners from a number of different institutions: the Feldenkrais Association of Switzerland, the *Autopoïesis* art school in Montréal, the *Océan Nord Theatre* in Brussels, the *Agence Louis-François Pinagot* theatre company, in Switzerland, the Feldenkrais Association of Geneva and the Geneva School of Music.

Which Tools?

Although the word *tool* is not part of the Feldenkrais Method's lexicon and never appeared in my Feldenkrais Method training,¹¹ if one understands a tool as leading to an action or allowing an operation that would otherwise be extremely tedious, then it seems to me that the term is accurate to describe what the Feldenkrais Method allows in the practice of acting. However, it is a word that brings to mind craftsmanship – the craftsmanship of actors striving to nurture the conditions necessary for their creativity to blossom, displaying all the possible variations of their movements, gestures and words, sharpening their perception, and anchoring their performance practices in the present.

The tool we refer to is not a 'passive' instrument but rather a "vector of potential" (Rasmi 2018: 15).¹² These tools help actors to conduct research of the awareness of the present moment by concentrating on the acting process rather than focussing on starting points and endings, which is often the case in rehearsals. From this point of view, an actor's work consists of either attempting to produce the precise result asked of them by the director or identifying a starting point from which they could begin their interpretation of the role, two approaches that we would consider to be static and different from the dynamic research that the Feldenkrais Method's tools help enable.

A Directory of Tools

Each tool is first defined according to the principles of the Feldenkrais Method and then followed

¹⁰ The second phase of this research project, entitled 'Heightening sensibility: for theatre practice inspired by the Feldenkrais Method' began in August 2021 and will take two years (Rahir and Geoffroy Schlittler 2023). See: <https://www.manufacture.ch/fr/5231/Rendre-Sensible>

¹¹ From 2013 to 2017, I received my Feldenkrais training under the direction of Yvan Joly. I would like to take this opportunity to say how much Yvan Joly taught me. Meeting him was crucial for me in my reflection process for this research.

¹² An expression used by Jacopo Rasmi (2018), in his Preface titled "Manuel d'immédiation", ['A Manuel for Immediation']

by an example of what it might allow actors to explore during their performance. This directory intends to launch some further reflection on possible practices, but it is not extensive. I thought of it as base material for future work with actors.

Amplitude of Action

Doing a movement in one's imagination can sometimes be suggested by some practitioners of the Feldenkrais Method during an Awareness Through Movement lesson. This sensitive experience of a movement in one's imagination is particularly manifest for a beginner student, after the completion of a large movement or gesture. Then, the goal is to progressively reduce the amplitude of the movement and observe whether or at what point the reduction causes perceptions of the movement to 'disappear'. For example, if someone tries to feel the sensation of lifting their head from the floor, should they make a big, bold movement with their head, or can the mere idea of lifting their head provide us with the sensation of that action? Any keen observer who has tried to reduce a large movement to such a small one, so small that it is no longer visible, will have noted that there is actually no limit to the perception of movement. The kinaesthetic and proprioceptive sensations of the movement, even when they are no longer visible from the outside, are perceptible to the actor. Indeed, the more the movement's amplitude is modulated, the more the actor's sensorial information gathering will be precise and differentiated ('doing less is doing more' as was often stated in my Feldenkrais Method training).

In this way, a physical action and an imagined action in the field of somatics are not experienced as two opposing propositions but rather as two nuances in the amplitude of the same movement. This is corroborated by neuroscientific theory. An action or movement is far more than a mere motor event: an action is also "the process of preparing or simulating a motor action. Imagining to get up from a couch is already a form of action as it activates nearly all the motor regions of the cerebral cortex" (Lachaux 2015: 31).¹³ Furthermore, the simple act of perceiving a chair, for example, implies that we possess a perceptual pattern of the act of sitting down on that chair in a particular way (Berthoz 2013).¹⁴ Thus, "most of our thoughts that evoke a bodily movement are actions too" (Lachaux 2015: 31).

In the acting practice, we believe that an actor who has experimented with the fact that an imagined action and a physical action are just two amplitudes of the same movement will no longer see a dichotomy between what is visible and invisible on the stage, what is internalised or externalised by them, and what is a part of the physical or psychological domain:

By affirming that the continuum of physical actions—that is to say the *life-line of the human body* – holds a very important place in the development of a character, that it gives birth to an internalised action, a [process of] feeling, Stanislavski called upon

¹³ This quote and the following quotes from Lachaux (2015) have been translated by Darren Hart specifically for this article.

¹⁴ The excerpt has been translated from French to English for this article. All quotations from French language sources were translated by the author for this article, except where identified.

actors to understand that the *link between a psychological existence and a physical existence cannot be broken and that, consequently, during a creative process, the analysis of human beings' internalised and externalised behaviours should not be separated.* (Knebel 2006: 48).¹⁵

The pursuit of the amplitude of action allows the continuous line for the actor evoked by the Russian director and teacher, Maria Knebel (1898-1985), quoting her master teacher Stanislavski (1863-1938). A continuous line implying to be lively at all times, to permanently bring in coexistence the possibility of making an action or not, until the completion of the movement. A score – as the result of a composition – stems from numerous decisions by the actor. Yet, an actor needs to confront and question their choices over and over, in order for the acting to stay lively. Being in the movement of writing the score means for the actor to work with what they previously diminished and amplified and to reinvest meaning in the movements they internalize or externalize. An actor who acknowledges that they are responsible of the choice of amplifying or not an action possesses the tools to open up a new acting potential.

What if each gesture of the role was indexed – may it be small or generous, visible or invisible, and dealt with as if all were equivalent? This would be a way to invite the actor to play with all the possible amplitudes of their gestures, to distinguish subsequently the gestures of the part which they choose to represent through a generous amplitude, those which they choose to reduce, those which are so faint that they will not be visible for an observer but will serve as an impulse, a desire.

In this manner, thought livens up until becoming a “motion-thought” (Seide 2009);¹⁶ a potential action; a desiring force. The actor’s thought is then experienced and performed as a sensation leading to action (“I want to do this, I am doing this”) and not as a static idea (“I need to think about this, I need to be that”), as a desire activating a movement (“I would like, I have the desire of”) rather than a command they would give themselves. What is at stake is to wonder what action is desired by the part, what triggers movement and if all the thoughts of the role can be completed as actions.

Reversibility

When practising the Feldenkrais Method, a movement is considered reversible “if it is possible to interrupt it at any moment and reverse its direction, start moving again in the original direction, or decide to do a totally different movement instead” (Feldenkrais 1993: 103). The concept of *reversibility* seems very useful in acting: the attention brought to the movements of the actors – and the undoing of those movements, can clarify the issues of a scene. This is true for all the sorts of movements and movement amplitudes: equally the movement of the “mental

¹⁵ The italics are in the original text of Maria Knebel (2006). Translated from French to English by the author.

¹⁶ Expression used by director Stuart Seide (2009) about the Feldenkrais Method.

gesture¹⁷ and the physical movement of the actor (Lachaux 2015: 31).

For example, one can think of the relationship between the lovers in *Le Misanthrope* by Molière. If the actor's on-stage goal is to represent Alceste's overwhelming desire to approach Célimène while telling her exactly the opposite, we might suggest to the actor playing Alceste that he explore the reversibility of his physical movements towards Célimène. Seeking to represent the action and the counter-action, Alceste might continuously strive to put physical distance between himself and Célimène, whereas he would seek to come closer to her through the script (how he articulates his lines, his desire to persuade her). Alternatively, Alceste's 'mental gesture' would be striving to convince Célimène that he was keeping his distance and was not interested in her, whereas his feet, as if his shoes were magnetised, would advance towards her hopelessly.

Reversibility could also be represented by an exploration of the back and forth of a single acting gesture (whether mental or physical). Continuously readjusting the direction of that gesture and its intention, Alceste would thus have to make his choices in the present moment and feed the tension he feels around Célimène in this game of two-way movement. Should he continue his physical movement in her direction, or should he retrace his steps?

Delay

Delay, as it is defined by Moshe Feldenkrais (1993), is “the possibility of hindering the act, that is to say to extend the time span flowing in between the intention and the enactment, [and this] allows the human being to gain knowledge of themselves” (61).

Using delay as an acting tool for theatre consists of giving oneself the possibility of pausing during the execution of a movement – at a moment defined beforehand or chosen while acting on the spur of the moment. Moreover, what the Feldenkrais Method delay involves is the exploration of the gap it is creating there and then: what happens when I am delaying my movement? When am I suspending it?

In theatre, delay can occur under different forms. The tradition of *lazzi* in the *Commedia dell'arte* could provide an example for a delay of a substantial duration. The *lazzi* allow the actor to improvise an interlude in the middle of a scene. Time is expanded in order to postpone the resolution of the action. Another example of delay could be a simple firm breath in between two words, a pause taken in the narration, or a suspended gesture within the action.

As an actress, before I discovered delay as per the Feldenkrais Method, I sometimes did not manage to 'inhabit' some full-stops, pauses and suspensions that the staging would impose on me. Since I could not understand the necessity of such disruptions, I used to find it difficult to invest in them and act as if they were natural to me. I could not manage to live this kind of

¹⁷ Jean-Philippe Lachaux defined our mental actions as being “mental gestures”: “most of our thoughts evoking bodily movements are also actions” (Lachaux 2015: 31).

external incentives as something else than a dichotomy: here, I am asked to embody a character, and there I am asked to stop, so I am not embodying anymore; here I am acting, there I am not acting anymore. Like an on/off button.

More than giving the actor the possibility of freezing in between their intention and their action (which would rather be the role of a pause than a full-stop), the delay brought about by using the Feldenkrais Method allows the actor to stretch as one pleases the thread between the intention and the action, to investigate this moment of the interval, to play with their desire of achieving the action before doing it effectively... even playing with these back-and-forth sways in between the desire and the accomplishment of the desire (as such, activating the tool of reversibility). Enabling to weave a thread of meaning, of acting, of continuous movement between what is not visible and what is becoming visible (as such, this tool is of course linked to the amplitude of the action), the delay engorges the perception in the actor within the expectation. Their immobility seems animated by thought: what am I doing when I am doing this? How does my urge for action come into being? What does it compel, free, put in tension? What does it put me through?

Delay, as I experienced it in Awareness Through Movement lessons, has helped me to set myself free of this restricted and binary attitude to commit this latent period that seems fascinating to me today since it overflows with possibilities. Moreover, the notion enlightened me on writings of great theatre practitioners that I had understood until then only under a theoretical angle and gave me practical clues on how to further explore those hints. For instance, it seems to me that the notion of delay echoes perfectly with the quests of the Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) and the Italian director, researcher and teacher Eugenio Barba (1936). Indeed, for the prior, theatrical work is declined in an alternation between acting and *pre-acting* (which he also calls *predigra*):

the pre-acting is a springboard, a moment of tension which resolves itself in the acting. The acting is a *coda*, whereas pre-acting is the present moment piling up, developing, and waiting to be resolved. [...] We are not interested as such in acting, but in the *predigra*, the pre-acting, because the longing generates for the spectator a superior tension than the one provoked by something they already received or pre-digested. Theatre, precisely, does not rely upon that. The spectator wants to dive into these expectations of the action. (Meyerhold cited in Barba 2004: 97-98).

Eugenio Barba (2004) dedicates a whole chapter of his book *The Paper Canoe* to try to describe (in his practice, but also summoning testimonies of other artists) this “dynamic preparation of the action for the actor” which he calls “sats”. “Here the action is thought of / done by the entire organism, which even in immobility reacts by tensions and “where the energy can be suspended in an immobility in movement” (Barba 2004: 96).

The Attentional Journey

I have coined the expression ‘the attentional journey’ to describe the following tool extracted from the Feldenkrais Method. I was inspired by Yvan Joly when he used to talk about the intentional ‘journey’ during my Feldenkrais Method training in Lyon (2017). According to Moshe Feldenkrais, for awareness to arise during an action, the person’s ‘concentration’¹⁸ must be focussed on: “1) each part of the action itself, 2) what is felt during that action, 3) the total body image, and the effect of the action on the body image” (Feldenkrais 2010: 102). Their journey through the different strata of the action takes place with the help of sensory information collected in different ways, but particularly through kinaesthetic and proprioceptive sensations. Yet these are sensations that we have little or no conscious awareness of: they provide us with the essential ability to perceive the movement needed to survive and develop our abilities to learn and become autonomous (Barrat 2017). By focussing our attention on kinaesthetic and proprioceptive sensations, we can train ourselves to adjust our movements at any moment during the action, thus improving on what we normally do unconsciously and automatically.¹⁹

On stage, an actor could train their capacities to explore actions as part of their attentional journey. The journey begins with an observational phase: actors become aware of what is stopping them from acting and thinking by eliminating any superfluous elements or tensions, comfort and by favouring their subjective, ‘egocentric’²⁰ point of view rather than conforming to a model (Berthoz 2013: 108-110).

Subsequent phases consist of actors playing with the different phases and types of attention (Petitmengin 2001).²¹ For example: the attention with which actors observe their own actions results in new perceptions of those actions (by observing the transition between two elements and by observing the effect that this observation induces on the acting); by being capable of focussing on several key objects simultaneously; by varying a particular focus from narrow to

¹⁸ I here use Moshe Feldenkrais’ term of ‘concentration’ which appears in the interview of Feldenkrais by Richard Schechner (Feldenkrais 2010). During the work with actors, we like to differentiate the expressions ‘focussing on’ or ‘calling one’s attention to’ which each qualify a different sensitive experience of the actor’s work. For the French neuroscience researcher and Feldenkrais Method practitioner, Pauline Hilt, with whom I have led a two-day laboratory, ‘being focussed’ characterises the fact of being able to maintain one’s attention on one element which they are concerned with, whereas the attention can be drawn by different elements, even in an unintended, if not unconscious, way (Research Laboratory, Module “Perception”, May 2022, Lausanne). In the Feldenkrais Method, according to Pauline Hilt, one develops an “intentional and sustained” attention (Hilt, personal communication, May 14 and 15, 2022).

¹⁹ See some of contemporary scientific research (e.g. Edith Ribot-Siscar, a researcher at INSERM, LNC, Aix-Marseille Université) described in the documentary by Vincent Amouroux (2019).

²⁰ According to Alain Berthoz (2013), “The personal space is composed by the space of the self (egocentric). It is perceived by the internal senses and is in principle located in the limits of the own body” (p. 108). The “egocentric frame of reference” contrasts with the allocentric frame of reference which consists in using the relations between objects with each other or in relation to an external reference to your body” (p. 110). (The original text is in French).

²¹ Expressions used by Claire Petitmengin (2001), such as “preliminary phases” and “types of attention”, in her description of “interior gestures” for implementing “intuitive experiences”.

wide; or by varying the intensities and rhythms of that focus. Far from over-stretching the actor's concentration, their attentional journey helps them develop fluidity of movement through their focus and constant capacity to adjust to the variety of points of view and their increased understanding of what they feel. With the aid of the Feldenkrais Method's somatic framework, actors can find ways to be able to reinvent how they observe themselves carrying out actions.

Variation

The Feldenkrais Method's objective is often not to teach students how to do something new, but rather to teach them how to do something they can already do, but in different ways. These tools can be applied to the performance of any theatrical score, whether the text must be followed closely or there is a framework offering room for improvisation. Tools allow actors to explore the different possibilities for action that they can either repeat from one performance to the next or use to approach a scene from several dramaturgical angles.

The core of the actor's work is centered around the question of repetition – but without ever seeming mechanical, always seeming *alive* (according to the widespread expression in our profession). However, their job is largely to repeat every night the same scene, the same words, the same action, within one same play. The tool of variation enables us to offer the actor the ability to concentrate themselves on the past decisions that they needed to do during rehearsals to compose their score (the decision of a move, an intonation, a gaze, etc.). Also to focus on those they must make quickly during a performance. In order to be a 'lively actor', at work, it would appear that they must not act as per final rehearsal decisions. They must be able to remember that each action has been chosen among a variety of possibilities, to be aware of their past decisions, but also of those actions they did not take, to challenge them in accordance with the present moment, to 'update' them immediately, instead of repeating the scene or the action as if they had always been that way, forgetting that as an actor they had to make choices in the past that allowed them to attain the opening night.

Variation as a tool from the Feldenkrais Method interests me for its power of broadening the options for the actor, and especially in contextualising these actions every single time as chosen in the midst of a multiplicity of other possible actions (thanks to variation). Still, the variation present in the Feldenkrais Method practice allows the actor to experiment for themselves that for each possible change for a same action, they can experiment a new point of view on the action. This new point of view will obviously imply other impacts on this action. For example, by varying the focus of their attention each time they come on stage, actors will notice modifications in the intention of their actions. They will thus be empowered with new possibilities of how to make their entrance.

Intentional Movement

In the Feldenkrais Method, each lesson of Awareness Through Movement is part of a precise framework, one that we might compare to the foundations of a house. For example, it might be

a precise position: 'Sit on the floor, knees bent, with the soles of your feet on the ground. Place your hands below your kneecaps.' From this initial position, a structure grows on which the student and the Feldenkrais Method practitioner will be able to improvise. The teacher might then describe a very precise intentional movement involving certain constraints, such as, 'Straighten your arms without moving the position of your hands.' From this starting point—from this intentional movement and its constraints—their research can start to develop and the student can begin to explore the possible variations available within this framework.

In theatre, practicing an intentional movement invites the actor to look for a point of view from which the acting will be able to unfold. This will act as a reference point during the exploration, a reference point to come back to if the actor gets lost in the process. If the actor begins with an intentional movement, then they do not need to think of a result or a goal that would need to be reached. It is the starting point that will need to be extended, its role is to make the actor forget about the arrival in order to engage in every step. The actor will henceforth be able to focus on the different variations and take interest in the process, in the way of doing and not what should be done. The frame suggested by this initial movement and the different variations of the process allow the actor to unfurl themselves in acting areas that no one could predict beforehand (neither them, nor the director). This quest is so often delved into during the devising work of a rehearsal: a creative framework is sought which can trigger the emergence of an unpredictable creative potentiality, offering the group the pleasure of surprise, beyond all habits.

Eliminating Unnecessary Effort

When practising the Feldenkrais Method, the more one is able to perceive their sensations as they carry out a movement, the better they will be able to judge its quality and effectiveness and thus adjust any conflicts in its organisation in real-time. To improve the perceptions of movement, it helps to reduce any unnecessary efforts. Moshe Feldenkrais used the famous example of the piano and the fly to illustrate this practice. If someone is carrying a piano and a fly lands on it, they will not be able to tell any difference in the weight. By contrast, if a large dog were to jump onto the piano, they would feel the extra weight immediately. Perceiving the weight of a fly requires reducing the number of other stimuli present or transporting something far lighter than a piano.²² In the same vein, only the reduction of the muscular tension will allow an actor to perceive anything other than the superfluous 'noise'²³ of their efforts to carry out a particular movement. Hence, if their movement is not muffled by the superfluous, the actor will be able to benefit from sufficient calm to detect the subtle sensorial changes that will arise throughout the entire action.

Within a complex score, the actor can be under the impression that there is an overload of

²² Feldenkrais was referring to the Fechner–Weber law. See Feldenkrais 2010: 101.

²³ Worsley (2016) and Yvan Joly (during his 2016 classes at Lyon's Institute for Feldenkrais Training), have both compared stimuli to "noise" that can hinder any connection to one's senses.

elements that need to be addressed. Often the actor thinks: “with a bit of training, the execution will become natural”. This way of proceeding might work, but is it for the best? Operating in this way and learning how to stack actions and acting instructions makes one lose the opportunity of doing less to do better. It is precisely in this case that it seems relevant to delineate accurately in the actor’s score an acting zone where it is possible to seek the least effort. For example, the desire to do the least possible to convince one’s partner of the validity of one’s argument; watching one’s partner or using one’s body with the least possible effort; making the least possible effort to maintain one’s balance, aided by gravity, the floor, walls and furniture. Instead of trying to focus one’s attention on every little thing that has to be done, we propose instead that the actor does the opposite and focuses their attention on what they can ‘let go of’ and what they do not have to do.

Finding a way to complete a sequence of actions and expend the least effort without having the impression of making mundane theatre, or failing to perform well, will require that the actor examines every element in that sequence. They will also have to pick out any element that takes on too much weight and is compensated for by the other elements becoming background elements. Choosing a sequence of actions—or a “line of actions” as Stanislavski termed it (Autant-Mathieu 2007), that the actor will be able to perform with the least possible effort necessitates a work of deconstruction. This consists of unfolding the different parameters that make up a dense sequence of performance actions. It should be noted that this exercise in deconstruction is often very beneficial, for example, in a ‘line rehearsal’: not to learn one’s lines off by heart but rather to master a complex score and tease out its substance or express it in performances on stage.

The Proportional Distribution of Movement

One can think of the example of the lesson by Moshe Feldenkrais (1994-2004) taught at Alexander Yanai (AY#50), which involves exploring the movement of lowering and raising the head and involving the spine in a proportionate manner. There, one must look for – and hence focus permanently on, a way in which each vertebra is involved in the movement evenly, that is to say, without it doing more or less work than the next vertebra. In order not to strain the vertebrae which have been accustomed to very little movement amplitude, one rather needs to concentrate on aligning the work of those vertebrae which move the most with those which move the less.

In drama classes, one regularly encounters young actors who furrow their brows or create tension around their eyes to show that they are interested or listening. Instead of asking a drama student to stop staring at their partner, we could suggest a new way of organising their listening gesture by trying to distribute their movements proportionally to the other parts of their body involved in their gaze. This could involve movements of the eyes, the face, the neck vertebra, the shoulder girdle (sternum, shoulder blades, collar bones and ribcage). In this way, the student will no longer focus their attention on what they should not do (stare) but will focus

on seeking to express so called active listening.

The active listening sought here does not involve dynamic movements but rather availability. Thus, 'being a good listener' or 'being interested' is primarily about both ears being directed to the speaker alone. The movement of directing the ears requires soliciting the neck vertebra and the shoulder girdle to make sound-capture easier. Listening to information is directly linked to its subjective reception and to the sensory messages perceived. Furthermore, that way of treating information *per se* leads to a performance potential: there is much to watch about a performer listening. Proof of active listening has to be reinforced from time to time through the wide variety of bodily movements and facial expressions that the actor can perform. These complex movements offer the actor a chance to listen actively by revealing all the potential in their acting.

The Acture

Feldenkrais (2014) wrote, "The posture is related to the action and not to the conservation of a body position. The word 'acture', which does not exist, would probably suit better" (147). To always keep in mind that the posture is not separate from the action, Moshe Feldenkrais hence created a neologism. The *acture*, "that is to say the way in which an action is accomplished and the best way to attain it" (Feldenkrais 2014: 148) is a posture experienced in continuous movement, inscribed in space and time, adapting itself to each situation, and depending on the environment. This posture does not correspond to a universal anatomical model, no more than to some exterior criteria of rightness one would be supposed to reach. The only rightness to seek is one of comfort, of the research of a zone in which different directions of movement are possible, and from which the ease of movement will emerge. The only guidelines that need to be followed are the sensations collected. These allow adjustment. There are also some criteria that need verifying: to make sure one is not making unnecessary effort, not feeling any resistance, looking for the reversibility of movement and to ensure that breathing is free to come and go, without ever being blocked (Feldenkrais 2014).

For student actors, the posture is often a sensitive subject, confronting them to a dilemma: they want to become flexible actors, freed from tensions, always available and inventive, but at the same time they feel invested with the duty of trying to correspond to what they think is the 'unique' way of standing on a stage (for instance: having their feet parallel and hip-width apart), to appear 'upright' and 'general', so that the person who will hire them can fill with meaning this virgin actor-like form. Flirting with the ideal of *neutrality*²⁴ and the belief that an actor is able to

²⁴ *Neutral* in theatrical jargon does not coincide perfectly with the definition of neutral in the Feldenkrais Method. In theatre, the use of the term neutral is a way of trying to reach a posture with no expression. It is often experienced as an ideal to aim for, and which, in my experience, is the cause of a great deal of tension for the actor. According to Jacques Lecoq, the neutral mask "is a mask with no particular expression nor recognizable character, which doesn't laugh or cry, which is neither sad nor merry and which relies on silence and a state of calm. The figure must be simple, consistent, and not provide any conflicts." (Translated from the French). Lecoq (n.d) < <https://www.theatre-du-sentier.com/masque-neutre-et-expressif/> >.

express *nothing* and take on any role thanks to their sole work of composition, this search engages more deadlocks than readiness. During their work, the student actors spend a lot of time rectifying themselves, trying to erase their distinctiveness (lift their head, pull their shoulders backwards, etc.). In addition to them forgetting that they have other visible distinctive features (age, leg length, volume of the breasts, hair colour, face, musicality of the voice, etc.), their entire attention becomes occupied by this muscular will, generating tensions, discomfort, pain. The thought is 'trapped' and the body tense (visible features for an observer), preventing them to feel anything at all during their acting and their interaction with the environment. They hence become images frozen in time, neither lively nor available. The preconceived idea of posture also involves that the actor is sometimes left to compartmentalize their score in order to fetch one so-called good position after the other, inevitably passing through intermediate movements where they cannot help 'dropping' their position ideal, which is impossible to keep in all situations.

The neologism 'acture' created by Moshe Feldenkrais is very much to the liking of actors. Quite obviously, one hears in it the word *action* which fundamentally defines our profession of 'act-or', since we are etymologically "the ones who do, who act". Hearing this new word is immediately experienced as an empowerment: the posture is not any longer a rigid notion, it can become, in turn, a movement, a never ending and transforming movement that the actor can weave from the beginning to the end of the performance.

Rather than trying to create the definitively correct posture for each performance or role, acture implies permanently adapting to the situation at hand and adapting throughout the action. Acture is not an ideal to strive towards; it is a process of interactions and adjustments; it is a back and forth between the actions proposed by the actor; the effects they perceive those actions to have on themselves and others; and the writing of their body through space. Acture is a tool enabling the actor to work in the here and now of the real world, influencing the continuity of their acting, and creating the possibility of a transformation, a shift concomitant to the embodiment of the character.

Conclusion

Here I am following the example of Odette Guimond (1994), who sees in this Method a possibility of addressing "movement as a vehicle of research" in theatre (102). What the choreographic artist and Feldenkrais Method practitioner, Fabienne Compét (2017), describes as being the possible trigger for the "setting into motion of a research" (11), I consider that through the filter of movement, these tools offer a capacity of creation. The latter allows us to emancipate from our theatrical habits, from our way of dissecting acting in order to analyse it; to free ourselves from the vocabulary usually applied to acting and to directing. This would give us the opportunity of a new point of view on some theatrical notions and on what makes the soma of an actor: a body which lives; which thinks; which feels.

These tools allow actors to stop seeing themselves as mere instruments – tormented by the

contradictions of a separation between the body and mind that are still so prevalent in the language used in rehearsals today, and encourages them to act as organisms that although they move, they also feel and think.

Finally, just like Odette Guimond (2001) or Stuart Seide (2009), for example, we observe that in the theatre, taking one's inspiration from the Feldenkrais Method inevitably leads us towards a redefinition of acting as we have practised it for so long, perhaps even towards envisaging a new way of performing on stage.

Epilogue

Since the writing of this directory of tools, two years have elapsed. Research laboratories with professional actors have been led to explore in practice these different tools. The director and actor Christian Geffroy Schlittler and myself, have twice conducted two weeks of research in Brussels (Belgium), at the *Theatre Océan Nord*, with a dozen of professional voluntary actors (August 2021 and January 2022), and a two-week practice workshop with another dozen of professional actors (organized by the FC*²⁵) at the *Comédie de Genève* theatre (March 2022). Additionally, workshops in theatre schools have been set up: in the theatre school the *Teintureries* (Lausanne, December 2021) and at *La Manufacture*, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland for students of the Directing and Scenography Master programme (2021-2022), as well as the Theatre Bachelor programme (October 2022). Thanks to these valuable experiments on the practice of the actors, thanks to actors' numerous trials and attempts, of their feedback, we are fine-tuning these tools progressively for our practice. A medium-length documentary with the testimonies of the actors is planned for 2023. Hence, each tool described above has already been subject to more complexity and nuance. Each tool has been inflected in a series of tools, increasingly specific.

The research project in the context of which these tools have started to be formulated will come to an end in October 2023. A book with exercises for the actor should be published, stemming from all these practical experiments. Information on the progress of the book will be available on the project website (Rahir Geffroy Schlittler 2023).

²⁵ The FC* is a professional association for research and the sharing of knowledge, which rallies performing arts professionals from Western Switzerland. "FC" stands for "Formation continue", ongoing training.

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Biography

Julie-Kazuko Rahir is a Belgian-Swiss actress, researcher, and qualified practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method (IFELD III, Lyon, 2017). She is associate researcher and teacher at La Manufacture – Haute école des arts de la scène/HES-SO, and teaches the Feldenkrais Method to dancers, actors, directors and scenographers in two other drama schools in French-speaking Switzerland, Les Teintureries in Lausanne and the Serge Martin School in Geneva.

julierahir@yahoo.fr / juliekazuko.rahir@manufacture.ch

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