

2^{ème} nouvel article anglais

An interview of François Combeau

(TITRE) From where is François Combeau's work coming ?

Where is F C's work coming from ? (à voir)

I've discovered and learnt many things through the interest I have shown in different methods and studies, whether it be in neurology and neuroscience (having relations to my work prior to becoming a Feldenkrais practitioner) or in pedagogy...

However, what I'd like to speak about now comes mainly from my personal experiences in life. It's about what it is that we learn in life that allows us to retain or recuperate stability when confronted with either a physical or psychological accident.

Like everyone, I've experienced various crises & drastic changes throughout my life. Some of those that I've been "lucky" enough to experience are:

- A serious accident while undergoing my military duty from which, according to the unanimous opinions of the doctors, I should have found myself in a wheelchair at 35 years old due to an important vertebral lesion. This was a serious physical trauma.
- A neurological accident twelve years ago, with paralysis and spasms throughout my right side. A neurological trauma.
- A violent emotional rupture... A real psychological trauma

Why "lucky"? Because, looking back now and considering the events and my reactions to each situation, I realize that these were three wonderful (and I'm choosing my words carefully) occasions to learn, to better understand and advance, allowing me to discover the real foundations of myself, of my inspirations and aspirations.

And finally, with and through the rich support of the method that M. Feldenkrais left us, it's this that I try to transmit to those who have enough confidence in me to be my students over the years.

In the three cases above, the most important for me was to feel that, in the middle of the storm, there was still an essential part of me that wasn't affected by the accident or the trauma; a real potential of life, movement and action.

This potential was always present and intact, even if, at that particular moment in time, I wasn't able to express it. This I felt by my capacity to continue to sense and to see myself in movement, to imagine myself moving and reacting in space.

This dynamic image of myself, developed throughout these life experiences, and while doing the Awareness Through Movement® lessons that the method presents us with, was the real definition of what and who I was.

It helped me to not identify myself with the difficulties of the moment, therefore allowing me immediately to advance and evolve.

Twenty years ago, when I had the neurological accident, many of my friends and colleagues offered to help me recuperate the use of those parts of myself which I no longer seemed to know how to use.

As every good practitioner would do, I myself explored the usage of my "good" side, and then tried transposing what I had integrated and organized to the side that no longer functioned, or was functioning badly.

I must say that after a lesson there was always an evident improvement but which, most of the time, was followed by a rather violent backwards step. It was as though my organism

wasn't able to take in what had been communicated to it, or to use what had been learnt.

What helped me most at that time was being touched (in every sense of the term), with the essential idea of giving me the opportunity to sense myself, to sense the potential movement of each of my joints.

I clearly remember today one particular hand being placed on me, and, by the special quality of its touch, saying to me: "do you feel how alive you are, the different directions in which you can move", a hand that didn't propose a particular movement or action but which spoke to me about myself.

Above all, I was highly sensitive to what other people saw and thought when looking at me, what I did or didn't do.

The persons who helped me most were those who gave me the opportunity to sense myself as the person that I knew, and who was able to evolve and to recuperate; those who evidently looked upon me as someone able to move, to react, someone full of potential, who was a complete person and not an illness, a handicap, a limit.

A quality of touch and way of being considered that I believe I recognize when I watch videos of Moshe Feldenkrais giving a Functional Integration[®] lesson and who, in a certain way and in many cases, seems to go beyond the technique that he is proposing (and I'm not at all demeaning the extraordinary conception and organization of his work).

Of course, speaking of this, it seems obvious. When one experiences it personally, it takes on its full sense, and, believe me, this is the difference, experiencing it totally. It's something that stays with you forever.

This then naturally caused me to question my own practice, my teaching of the method and the development of the capacities necessary to one being able to practice the art of Feldenkrais.

How can a practitioner observe and touch the student, sense and make it possible for the student to also sense this life and movement potential, that which is inherently possible to his own structure, without necessarily having to express this potential in action?

From this experience, and also throughout the many post-trainings that I have given, has come an extremely structured and progressive series of situational exercises which essentially aim to allow each student to develop his/her capabilities to see, sense and imagine the other person moving beyond that which he/she is able to express. To sense, by placing their ones' hands on the person, the directions in which the movement and actions could be developed, perceiving what parts of the person these movements would engage and how the whole of this person would reorganize itself to be able to move in these directions.

Being able to touch the person in such a way that will allow him/her to sense their potential, the possibilities that are within themselves even if the person is currently unable to express them.

For example, placing their one's hand on the person's ankle and sensing to which side the head would turn most easily, perceiving how the force would pass, more or less easily, throughout the skeleton if they were very gently pushed or pulled ... sensing how the person would react in different situations.

Observing a person who may be perhaps hemiplegic and being able to "see" that person

walking, not with a type of mental positive thinking, but thanks to this capacity to see the other person in movement, in action, even before any action is expressed. Seeing how the person would or wouldn't engage the various parts of itself or what would limit its engagement in action...

In such a way that the reference principal, over and above all the work that the practitioner will propose, is the moving person, walking, speaking, and reacting in the world surrounding them.

A further experience which was a source of inspiration for me: a couple of years ago I undertook art classes, sketching live models, and from these I retained something that my teacher often said:

“You can't reduce the existence of the models to the description of the parts that they're made up of. It's the expression of the dynamic relations between these parts and their interactions with space and their environment that create the life of the model and defines what he is and how he's organized. Correlations between space, shadows, light, lines of force and extreme points being like stars that define a constellation...”

This work, over several years, helped me considerably “see” above and beyond that what I could observe in front of me. It helped me represent the persons in their reality, which comes forth and imposes itself, rather than analyze them via a set of standards, even a very thorough one.

This also helped me observe and follow an evolution with different points of view, as though having different eyes looking upon the model. This training in how to observe helped me considerably in developing my capacity to dynamically “read” and better understand a person's organization, being able to follow the person as a whole, made up of all their interdependences, in movement.

This work greatly helped me in teaching ATM*s by helping me understand the relation between the movements and the potential movements; what it is that means that the lesson is truly integrated, makes sense for the person.

ATM*: Awareness Through Movement lessons

During post-trainings that I give about “The art of teaching ATM”, I've developed many kinds of scannings or awakenings (which, by developing them further, have become real lessons) using certain observation exercises that we had practiced in the art classes.

Some examples of these are:

- How to draw a student's attention to the idea of “interior-exterior” spaces (ear-shoulder, arms-side of ribcage, the space between the legs) and the variations in these spaces during movement, initiating the action from these parts rather than having their attention and intention fixed on the movement of an arm, a leg...
- Tracing the lines of force that cross through us and noting their meeting points within us or outside of us, imagining which sorts of movements of the whole or of a part would bring these points into movement.

This idea for example, very rapidly developed in IF work: how to address one or another vertebra from one foot, one finger, the pelvis...

Better understanding integration schemes.

Sensing where the force will go to when pushing or pulling, and being able to adapt the direction so as to address a particular part even before proposing the movement, as when playing billiards.

- **Prolonging** the lines of movement within and outside of the person, and perceiving

all kinds of dynamic relations with the environment.

- **Having a clear perception** of position in the space around us and defining oneself by this permanent dynamic relation between our interior and exterior spaces (furthering this idea, I often give directions and consigns for movement which take into account the inside-outside relation, such as: advance your arm, bringing it closer to the ceiling, taking it further away from the floor...or, rotate your leg inwards or outwards while following the movement of your big toe across the ceiling...).

Throughout all these years of teaching, I've observed how it helps the students in their relations to others and also to the world in which we live to be able to situate themselves and to become aware of the consequences of their actions and movements in the environment, according to their interior/exterior relations.

There are many examples that can be given of this and I've developed a seminar on the theme "A dynamic self-image" which covers all of these elements, choosing ATMs from the repertory and creating new learning situations based upon these "observation" exercises to illustrate the ideas.

I've been fascinated by these exercises and their benefits in my ATM and FI teaching. Fascinated to realize how this work allowed my capacity to observe and to see to evolve. Enhancing how I could consider the living person as a whole in his dynamic reality, infinitely richer and more complex than the descriptions, no matter how complete, of the parts that make them up...

Being able sometimes to sense that which can't be described in words, by definitions, but which makes each one of us that what we are, in our own richness and complexity, with a before and after.

Becoming more able, quoting the writer Marguerite Yourcenar, to have an "intelligent" outlook upon oneself and upon others. In her book "Hadrien's Memories" she wrote: **"The real place of birth is where, for the first time, we looked upon ourselves in an intelligent manner"**.

In teaching post-trainings on this theme, I've remarked how it has helped practitioners refine their own capacity to see, sense and imagine the other person in movement, sensing in advance the consequences that a movement or action will have on the whole of the person's organization, and also refining their capacity to give clearer and more pertinent directions in relation to the intention and direction, allowing a real transmission of force...