

AReview

Dennis Leri

The Intelligence of Moving Bodies: A Somatic View of Life and Its Consequences

Carl Ginsburg, Lucia Schuette-Ginsburg

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Carl Ginsburg and Lucia Schuette-Ginsburg have crafted a singular book. It braids together several traditions of thought and practice: science, especially neuroscience and cognitive science; anecdote and first-person narrative; and deep insights into the actual practice of the Feldenkrais Method of somatic education. Carl Ginsburg's position is unique in the Feldenkrais community. Not only is he one of its most competent practitioners, he is also a scientist, a former professor of chemistry, and a writer known for his beautiful literary constructions. Grounded in many years of private practice and training others in the Feldenkrais Method, his insights have much to tell us about what we as Feldenkrais practitioners do. So, what has he done in his book that hasn't been done before?

For one, Ginsburg has drawn Moshe Feldenkrais into a working relationship with some of the most important thinkers and trends in contemporary thought. I spent the winter and spring of 1979 in Israel working for and studying with Feldenkrais. In our many discussions I had tried to make the case for the relevance of the research and neuro-epistemology of Francisco Varela, Humberto Maturana and Heinz von Foerster, all of whom I had studied with. Their notion of autopoiesis (from Greek *auto-* [auto-], meaning "self;" and *poiesis*, meaning "creation, production") was at the time a radically new definition of what constitutes a living system. When I left Israel I gave Feldenkrais my copy of Francisco Varela's *Principles of Biological Autonomy*. In 1980, I had the opportunity to introduce Feldenkrais to Varela. Feldenkrais surprised and delighted Varela by telling him that the *Principles of Biological Autonomy* was one of the two or three most important books he had ever read. To understand the significance and importance of Varela's worldview to the practice of Functional Integration and Awareness Through Movement, *The Intelligence of Moving Bodies* is a must read. But, there are a thousand other reasons to read it also.

For any Feldenkrais practitioner, or even a long-term lay student, the many short observational experiments and explorations will seem familiar. The case histories from the authors' Feldenkrais practices are solid and well told. Yet, set against the background of the rest of the book, their explorations and anecdotes yield a new comprehension and appreciation of the Feldenkrais Method as well as a sense of the book's import. The exercises and case studies situate the Feldenkrais Method alongside an emerging approach to consciousness research known as First Person science. First Person science necessitates shifting the focus from observed systems to observing systems. Heinz von Foerster, in his keynote address at the 1992 Feldenkrais Guild annual conference, made the call for this new kind of science to be named "systemics: It is to be understood that systemics will be no less rigorous than traditional science. In fact, because it invests our researches with a thorough accounting of our own contributions to our observations and our subsequent formulations, it demands of the practitioner not only a fundamental ethics but also—and importantly—an evolving and self-refining aesthetics. Feldenkrais practitioners can live with Heinz von Foerster's definitions: Ethics—act always to increase choices. Feldenkrais

practitioners: We start out assuming that, given their perception, each person makes the best choice possible. That's the first half of an ethical stance. The other half is how we endeavor to expand their perception of options. Again, von Foerster: Aesthetics – to know, learn how to act. Feldenkrais practitioners: We become adept at evaluating sensations based upon two related dynamics of distinguishing differences. There are "more or less" differences and "same and different" differences. The feeling for difference fosters learning how to learn.

I am partial to Ginsburg's chapter on Kelso and Engstrom's "Coordination Dynamics:"¹ Kelso and Engstrom write that "the science of coordination ... [is] a set of context-dependent laws or rules that describe, explain, and predict how patterns of coordination form, adapt, persist and change in natural systems." Kelso and Engstrom trace their scientific pedigree to Aharon Katchalsky, known in Israel as Aharon Katsir. Very close friends, Feldenkrais and Katsir authored a book on the origins of thinking. Feldenkrais and I talked about the ideas in the book so I have no doubt it once existed. Sadly, the manuscript of that book was never found amongst Feldenkrais's belongings. What does remain is a conversation between Aharon Katsir and Moshe Feldenkrais which was published in 2006 in *The Feldenkrais Journal* #19 with an introduction by Carl Ginsburg. In *The Intelligence of Moving Bodies* Ginsburg gives a good accounting of a kind of science that is compatible with a first-person, felt-sense awareness. With coordination dynamics he says, "one can potentially create a research agenda to account for the integrative and disintegrative processes of living systems." What kinds of processes characterize living systems? They would need to be linear and nonlinear, able to shift from convergence to divergence and back, have both "attractors" and "repellers," be capable of having stability, meta-stability, and instability, plus they could be multifunctional.

The language of coordination dynamics could easily describe the learning dynamics found in Feldenkrais lessons. I would say that the logic and aesthetic style of Ginsburg's writing could also be so described. I say that as a compliment. While we may find ourselves following along with the book's general structure and direction, at various moments this or that thought might arise in response to a quote, story, thought experiment, or description that completely surprises us and gives us pause. It can also launch us on a novel train of thought that comes more from reading between the lines than reading the lines themselves.

Perhaps the book rests most firmly upon the work of G. Spencer-Brown, who created the cult classic, the *Laws of Form*.² Brown built upon the work of C. S. Peirce, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Alonzo Church, and others. That book underpins much of Ginsburg's efforts to unite many different levels of first-person experience and third-person information. Initially the idea behind Spencer-Brown's book came from an intractable real-world engineering problem. Since it was intractable it meant that a new means was needed to approach it. Rather than solving a problem, the task became how to pose it. In learning how to pose the problem, Spencer-Brown essentially accomplished a profound unlearning of some of the most entrenched elements in mathematics. He was able to deconstruct any number system down to a more fundamental or primitive level by shifting from the use of numbers to using tokens of indication. He noted that before we can number or enumerate, we must first distinguish. That is, to form any collection (cardinality) or delineate a series (ordinality) of objects (virtual or actual), we must first draw a distinction, that is, indicate a *this ... this ... this* from a background *that*, and then map the distinctions or indications into a numerical system. By circumventing mapping into a number system, he was able to create a tool fit to underpin a new framing of problems in engineering, biology, physics, and pure mathematics.

Ginsburg explains quite well how and why the so-called "calculus of indications" is so helpful when one needs to understand living systems as temporal processes. While the *Laws of Form* is ostensibly about mathematics, the import for any kind of fundamental thinking is not lost on Spencer-Brown, whose preface and notes to the *Laws of Farm* have become famous in their own right. Within the Feldenkrais tradition, essential to any really new thought, act, feeling, or sensation, is the need to unlearn the hold of its past meanings on us and to move the new meanings into a new meaningfulness, a new "form of life." We must, as the poet Valery says, understand that "Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees." Unlearning the hold of verbal meaning resonates with Feldenkrais's mistrust of verbal understanding, which is, thinking that if you can name it you then understand it. Feldenkrais encouraged us to think in images, that is to say, to think for ourselves out of how life presents itself to us. Fundamental images prior to a naming of them are for Spencer-Brown tokens for how our primary processes *cleave* us to the world we make. To cleave, meaning to cut and also to join, is Spencer-Brown's way of characterizing and packing differentiation and integration into a simple, fundamental image. Novel and fresh images are essential to stimulate a reaching for Feldenkrais's notion of mature behavior, that form of life that exhibits harmonious thinking, sensing, feeling, and acting.

Ginsburg and Schuette-Ginsburg rekindle our connections to ways that the Feldenkrais Method can create a new relation to the world, to others, to ourselves. Developmental learning theory, biology, neurobiology, thoughts on affect, an exegesis of perception, Feldenkrais anecdotes from their practices, observational explorations, a nifty glossary and a fantastic bibliography—it's all in the book! The book is a reminder that, in being a Feldenkrais practitioner, one has experienced a fundamental shift away from received second-hand knowledge, *knowing what*, to embracing a practice, a way to *know how*.

NOTES

1 George Spencer-Brown, *The Laws of Form* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969).

2 J.A. Scott Kelso and David A. Engstrom, *The Complementary Nature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

Contributors

Adam Cole is a music educator in Atlanta, Georgia. He incorporates the Feldenkrais work into his instruction to enhance musical learning, and to broaden awareness about the Feldenkrais Method in the public school system. Adam is also a novelist and composer. His most recent book, *A Thousand Points of Darkness*, is coming soon from Nundei Press.

Linda Flanders (1991) lives in Bay City, Wisconsin and works primarily in Minnesota and Wisconsin. She has developed a unique approach to using her Feldenkrais training in the areas of filmmaking, prevention program design, and atypical children. Her Movie Making Process was nominated as one of the Midwest's most promising prevention programs.

Carl Ginsburg has been writing about the Feldenkrais Method since the beginning of his training with Moshe Feldenkrais (1975-1977) in San Francisco. In his incarnation prior to his Feldenkrais career he taught chemistry at the college level. In addition to his many writings he also edited Feldenkrais's book, *The Master Maues*, and wrote a book of short stories, *Medicine Journeys*. His new book *The Intelligence of Moving Bodies: A Somatic View of Life and Its Consequences* is now available.

Dennis Leri lives in San Rafael, California.

Joseph Love (1929-1992) was an American painter and art critic who lived in Japan for 36 years. His work is made available to us by his wife, Feldenkrais practitioner Yasuko Kasami, who lives and practices in Tokyo and organizes Feldenkrais training programs there.

Alan S. Queste is known for his clarity, creativity, and down-to-earth style of teaching as he brings a depth of understanding, humor, and a gentle human perspective to the learning of the

Feldenkrais Method. Trained by Dr. Feldenkrais, he teaches worldwide in Feldenkrais professional training programs and has directed and co-directed trainings in New York, California, Arizona, Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth, Australia, and Malmo, Sweden. His upcoming trainings are in Malmo, Sweden; and Bogota, Colombia.

Donna Ray, M.A., MFT, is an internationally known Feldenkrais Trainer and psychotherapist. She practices in Encinitas/San Diego, California. Her practice includes people of all ages and stages of life. She is an active member of The Mindsight Institute in Los Angeles, directed by Dan Siegel, MD, and is a member of the Feldenkrais Guild of North America.

Kattin Smithback recently spent a month in India with her daughters and would love to go back. Until then, she makes do with a cup of hot chai and her photos.

Francesca Speciani is a journalist, author, translator, and editing counselor in the field of psychology and complementary medicine. She is also a bodyworker and Gestalt therapist. She works and lives in Milan with two children and two cats.

Jader Tolja (Italy), MD, psychotherapist, and Experiential Anatomy trainer, is professor of Body Conscious Design at universities and design schools in Europe, Asia and the United States. The main focus of his research has been the relationship between body, mind, and culture. He started this inquiry in 1979 at one of the first departments for psychosomatic medicine in Europe and has studied advanced bodywork and movement techniques, including training in the Feldenkrais Method in France, and directed several Master programs of Experiential Anatomy. He is author and co-author of several books on the subject of which *Body-Thinking* is the most known and translated.