BODILY AWARENESS: THE THEATRE WRITINGS OF MICHAEL CHEKHOV AND TADASHI SUZUKI

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an examination of the theatre writings of Michael Chekhov’s *To the Actor* and Tadashi Suzuki’s “Grammar of the Feet,” to determine the fundamental aspects within each of these methods that leads the actor towards the development of bodily awareness. Moshé Feldenkrais’s understanding of developing bodily awareness as demonstrated by his book *Awareness Through Movement* will be utilized as a tool to examine the work of Chekhov and Suzuki. Through this examination I hope to develop a greater understanding of the fundamental principles within these two actor training programs that facilitate the awareness of the actor’s body, as well, I hope point up the importance of such physically-based actor training methods to the contemporary actor.
I would like to acknowledge all of my friends and family that helped and supported me throughout graduate school. I would also like to acknowledge the faculty and staff at Bowling Green State University for their help and guidance in the writing of this thesis.
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INTRODUCTION

The directors Michael Chekhov and Tadashi Suzuki have each developed physically-based actor training methods that have received world-wide recognition. As well, each artist approaches training the actor through utilization of the movements of the body. I found many commonalities within their writings when searching for what awareness means to both Chekhov and Suzuki. The most obvious is that each requires the actor to observe every aspect of the body, which, over time, along with practice, leads to utilization and an understanding of the energies that emanate from the body. It is this aspect of their work that I find fascinating. Both have developed methods that not only embrace awareness for the actor, but also awareness that culminates in the utilization of the body’s energies. The development of functional control of the energies of the body is not an easily mastered skill and requires years of training. The development of this energy utilization is a fundamental aspect of the writings of Chekhov and Suzuki and is discussed at great length by both. Although the utilization of the body’s energies is only one aspect of awareness for the actor, both writers strive for the actor to obtain high levels of awareness within the body. Bodily awareness is essential to the actor; to know the body is to be able to utilize the body effectively and efficiently, whether it is to focus the breathing for a lengthy monologue or attaining a deep connection to the space or other actors. In looking at awareness training in theatre, there is no doubt that bodily awareness is connected intrinsically to performing upon the stage. Performing by its very nature makes the human body the object of intense observation. One reason I initially chose these artists as a subject of study is the attention they both pay to the observation of and controlling the body’s energies, which represents in my view awareness of the whole body.
In order to more fully understand how these actor training methods instill awareness in the body, I propose to study both Chekhov and Suzuki’s methods using knowledge of how awareness develops in the body as provided in Moshé Feldenkrais’s book, *Awareness Through Movement*. Although, there has been much research done on both Suzuki and Chekhov, the focus of this research usually focuses on the whole of each individuals’ work and attempts to describe that work within the context of its own processes. Viewing their writings through Feldenkrais’s understanding of awareness will clarify how each of these systems works towards bodily awareness.

The chief problem attacked by both Michael Chekhov’s and Tadashi Suzuki’s acting methods is uniting body and mind. To accomplish this union, both methods rely on intensive focused training of the body. I contend that this focused intensive training not only helps to unify the body and mind but also helps the student begin to develop awareness similar to the bodily awareness discussed by Feldenkrais. According to Feldenkrais, bodily awareness is achieved through a conscious observation of the movements of the body. Consistently practiced, observation of movement develops a unity within the sensations, feelings, and thoughts of the body creating a holistic vision of oneself, allowing one to “make discoveries, invent, create, innovate, and ‘know’” the world in a new way (Feldenkrais 54).

In this thesis I will examine the theatre writings of Chekhov and Suzuki searching for, first, a utilization and observation of the body’s movements. Second, I will examine their writings to understand whether or not these writers use those observed movements to explore the whole body as outlined by Feldenkrais’s book *Awareness Through Movement*. If these methods do comparably develop a bodily awareness similar to Feldenkrais’s understanding of development of bodily awareness, then the two methods may contain commonalities that might
serve as fundamental principles of developing awareness or the necessary building blocks for the actor to become aware of self. This bodily awareness should further augment communication with other actors on stage as well as with the audience, creating a more engaging and controlled acting body. By examining these two artists’ methods using Feldenkrais’s understanding of how to develop bodily awareness, I hope to not only point up the similarities that exist as fundamental principles within the two approaches, but also suggest that such body-centered methods should be a central component of contemporary actor training.

Due to the sheer volume of the written material that directly and/or indirectly touches upon bodily awareness, the research for this thesis needs to be limited. This thesis will be limited to the examination of the writings that surround the work of Michael Chekhov and Tadashi Suzuki. Michael Chekhov’s book To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting will serve as the primary source which will focus and manage the size of the inquiry into Chekhov’s extensive body of work.¹ For the purposes of this thesis, Chekhov’s To the Actor supplies the information about his technique for the basis of my argument, whereas, to support my observations of Suzuki’s work, I will need to include secondary sources and journal articles that will help understanding his work as a whole process. Tadashi Suzuki’s book, The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki, Ian Carruthers and Takahashi Yasunari’s book, The Theatre of Suzuki Tadashi as well as Paul Allian’s, The Art of Stillness: The Theatre Practices of Tadashi Suzuki will serve as the core readings in the examination of Suzuki’s Method. In many respects, the writings of Feldenkrais, Chekhov, and Suzuki offer an additional challenge. Much of their writings were originally written in other languages and through translation to English of the original meaning becomes distorted or lost. Particularly in the translations of The Way of Acting, many of Suzuki’s ideals on “Grammar of the Feet” are expressed only in vague ways

¹ The version used for the purposes of this thesis was published in 2002.
through that translation. Hopefully by approaching his actor training from the many different viewpoints offered through these sources, I will be able to explore Suzuki’s writings on “Grammar of the Feet” and determine the method’s facility to build awareness of the whole body. The key research question that I hope to address within this thesis is: what are the fundamental principles that operate throughout both Chekhov’s and Suzuki’s actor training methods and do these methods support the understanding of whole body awareness as described by Moshé Feldenkrais in his book, *Awareness Through Movement*?

There are a few definitions and terms that will be necessary for a discussion of Feldenkrais’s, Chekhov’s, and Suzuki’s work. The definition for “awareness” will be compiled through the writings of Feldenkrais as it is a complex term that is key to examining these theatre writings. It will be discussed at length in chapter one. “Consciousness” is a word that Feldenkrais uses to define awareness; this term needs to be defined before proceeding. Consciousness, as defined by Feldenkrais is the waking state of our mind. Chiefly, anytime the mind is not sleeping is considered a conscious state of being. Consciousness combined with observation of movement is the first step to building bodily awareness.

“Movement,” “sensations,” “feelings,” and “thoughts” are the four terms that will be used throughout this thesis and are based on Feldenkrais’s observations of the inner workings of the body. In the following passage Feldenkrais gives his definition of each of the components of action:

> Four components make up the waking state: sensation, feeling, thought, and movement. Each one serves as a basis for a whole series of methods of correction.
In *sensation* we include, in addition to the five familiar senses, the kinesthetic sense, which comprise pain, orientation of space, the passage of time, and rhythm.

In *feeling* we include—apart from the familiar emotions of joy, grief, anger, and so forth—self-respect, inferiority, supersensitivity, and other conscious and unconscious emotions that color our lives.

*Thinking* includes all functions of intellect, such as the opposition of the right and left, good and bad, right and wrong, understanding, knowing that one understands, classifying things, recognizing rules, imagining, knowing what is sensed and felt, remembering all the above, and so on.

*Movement* includes all temporal and spatial changes in the state and configurations of the body and its parts, such as breathing, eating, speaking, blood circulation, and digestion.” (31)

It is through exercising each of these parts of action that Feldenkrais’s awareness is developed in the body to the highest degree and it is through these terms that both Chekhov’s and Suzuki’s methods will be examined.

Moshe Feldenkrais was born in the Ukraine, May 6, 1904. He immigrated to Palestine in 1918, where he obtained his high school diploma in 1925 and began studying the self-defense art of *jiu jitsu*. In 1933, with the encouragement of Kano Jigorō, Feldenkrais continued his studies in Judo. He received a black belt in 1936 and in 1938 he received a second degree black belt.

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3 Kano Jigorō was the founder of the Japanese martial art of *Jiu Jitsu*. He was born on October 28, 1860 and he died on May 4, 1938.
Having problems with a recurring knee injury that he refused to have surgery upon, he began working on a program of self-rehabilitation. Feldenkrais’s book *Awareness Through Movement*, first published 1972, is a result of further study on those same principles of self-rehabilitation incorporated with his understanding of *jiu jitsu*. He approaches his work on the body with a thorough scientific methodology. A description of his method on the Feldenkrais Resources homepage states:

The Feldenkrais Method is an unusual melding of motor development, biomechanics, psychology and martial arts. It was developed by Moshé Feldenkrais, D.Sc., who synthesized insights from physics, motor development, bio-mechanics, psychology, and martial arts to develop a powerful, effective, and practical application, demonstrating the inseparableness of thought, feeling, perception and action. It is recognized for its demonstrated ability to improve posture, flexibility, coordination, self-image and to alleviate muscular tension and pain.”

(Feldenkrais Resources)

From this depiction, scientific methodology plays a considerable role in the development of his method. The chief reason I chose to use Feldenkrais’s understanding and work as a lens to examine the theatre writings of Chekhov and Suzuki was that his method has been widely accepted and practiced around the world. According to the *Center for Health and Healing*:

Worldwide, over 2,000 Feldenkrais teachers can be found in over 20 countries. The Method® has been used in individuals with a variety of orthopedic and neurologic conditions. It has been taught as a means of increasing flexibility in the elderly. Actors, singers, dancers and athletes
have studied it to improve breathing, balance, coordination, and endurance, and in response to injury. Students have used it to improve their mental abilities and self-awareness. Moshe Feldenkrais felt that the benefits of this approach reach far beyond the physical, expanding the range of use of one’s brain power, enhancing self-esteem and improving overall quality of life. (Center for Health and Healing)

Aside from the many health benefits associated with the practice of Feldenkrais’s Method, actors as well as other types of performers can utilize its principles to gain greater over-all control of their bodies. To maintain standards in the teaching of his method world-wide, the International Feldenkrais Federation was formed. Established in 1992, it is the coordinating organization for many of the Feldenkrais guilds, associations, and other professionally run Feldenkrais training programs.

The Feldenkrais Method approaches bodily awareness from a totalistic view, placing no more importance on one part of the body than any other. The purposeful building of bodily awareness is best summed up by Feldenkrais. He writes, “Our systematic study and awareness should provide man with a means of scanning all fields of action [movement, sensation, feeling, thought] so he can find a place for himself where he can act and breathe freely” (29). What Feldenkrais describes above is the reason for the existence of many actor training methods worldwide. Ideally these methods help the actors reach a point where they can “act and breathe freely,” even when under the constraints of being in front of a large audience. In Feldenkrais’s Method, the scientific understanding of the body combined with the ability to free the body of extraneous exertion, while continually strengthening the over-all coordination of the body, makes his Method ideal for examining the writings of Michael Chekhov and Tadashi Suzuki.
In Franc Chamberlain’s discussion of Chekhov, he clearly indicates how important Chekhov was and is to the development of the acting craft. He writes:

Michael Chekhov, regarded as a phenomenal actor by many who saw him, is one of the key figures in the twentieth-century theatre. His ability to transform himself onstage was celebrated by some of major directors of the century [...] his practical advice continues to inspire actors through his writings and through schools devoted to his work in Russia, Lithuania, Holland, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain and the US. His book, *To the Actor*, is considered one of the best actor-training manuals ever published in the European tradition. (Chamberlain 1)

Michael Chekhov was born on August 16, 1891 in St. Petersburg, Russia. In 1907, Chekhov began his actor training at the Suvorin Theatre School at the age of sixteen. After graduating and playing several roles with Maly Suvorinski Theatre in St. Petersburg, he decided to audition for a place in the Moscow Arts Theatre (MAT). He was accepted into the program where he continued his actor training. Chekhov’s actor training was heavily influenced by Constantine Stanislavski.

The heart of Stanislavski’s theatre was centered on training the actor to display, as realistic as possible, life upon the stage. All aspects of his production were focused faithfully on reproducing what could be observed in everyday reality. In the 1920’s, tours of the MAT to New York City brought his system to America. From New York, his system spread across America to Hollywood. Sharon M. Carnicke described his influence on American theatre. She writes, “Stanislavsky’s influence on US acting remains indisputable. His former students emigrated and taught in New York and Hollywood: Richard Boleslavsky, Maria Ouspenskaya, Andrius Jilinsky, Leo and Varvara Bulgakov, Vera Solovyova, Tamara Daykarhanova, and Michael
Chekhov among them. The Group Theatre and the Actors Studio consciously modeled themselves upon his work” (3). The Group Theatre as well as The Actors Studio both used adapted methods of Stanislavski’s system. Even so, the use of his system is not wholly reflected in their work due to translations, disagreement about the system, and other unavoidable miscommunications. The importance here is that the introduction of Stanislavski’s system to the United States paved the way for the acceptance of Chekhov’s work in later years, mostly because Chekhov had become well-known as one of Stanislavski’s students.

As noted above, Chekhov moved to the United States, where he taught his method directly to American actors. In Stanislavski’s early writings, he suggests that actor training requires constant observation of the body. Similarly, Chekhov’s theatre writings reflect the idea that constant observation and scrutiny of the body is a necessary element to improve the technique of the actor. In many ways Chekhov builds upon, but nonetheless, goes beyond the realism established by Stanislavski and the MAT.

Beyond the influences of Stanislavski and other Western theatrical traditions, Rudolph Steiner’s writings impacted heavily on Chekhov’s work.4 Charles Marowitz discusses how the work of Chekhov sharply divides from those ideals of his former teacher Stanislavski, due to the influence of Steiner. Marowitz writes:

Chekhov, on the other hand, had been seduced by the Symbolists and Eastern philosophies and, early in his life, had become a convert to Rudolph Steiner’s Anthroposophy [ . . . ] Chekhov’s truth transcended the ‘monkey see, monkey do’ aspect of Naturalism. The accurate reproduction of actors’ emotional state was, for him, only one aspect of

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4 Rudolph Steiner was a social thinker, literary scholar, philosopher, artist, playwright, educator, and a practitioner of esotericism. He advanced a theory called “Anthroposophy,” which was principally concerned with guiding the spiritual body through the spiritual Universe.
artistic truth, but one that that ignored what Chekhov later came to call ‘the higher I”; that part of man’s psyche that transcended his social shell. His route to characterization was through the imagination not verisimilitude. Consequently, he grew progressively more dissatisfied with the very principles that underpinned Stanislasky’s art. (10)

Stanislavski and Steiner had a great effect on the work and writings of Chekhov. In short, Chekhov was seeking to understand the human mind, which he felt was not represented in Stanislavski’s realistic theatre.

An experience that has had a direct impact on the development of this thesis is found expressed in “Exercise 2,” of To the Actor. In the exercise Chekhov asks the training actor to imagine energy emanating from the chest. The purpose of this exercise, Chekhov states, is the development of sensations within the body. He writes, “The imaginary center in your chest will also give you the sensation that your whole body is approaching, as it were, an “ideal” type of human body [. . .] So continue these exercises until you feel that the powerful center within your chest is a natural part of you” (8). The development of the “powerful center,” he advises should be introduced early within the exercises because it plays an instrumental role in the awakening the sensitivities of the actor’s body. The use of the body’s energy is further explored in later exercises and, according to Chekhov, is an aspect that should be cultivated throughout an actor’s training. In other exercises, involving energy work, he asks the actor to imagine projecting the energy of the body beyond the boundaries of the skin, even extending that bodily energy around a prop or other people. The awareness of body that Chekhov wants the actor to seek is connected to every aspect of the theatre space and its occupants. An awareness of not just one’s own body,
but an awareness of the space surrounds that body. A theatre space that Chekhov understands should be filled and utilized by the energies of the actor’s body.

Similarly, the Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki developed a system of actor training that focuses on grounding the actor to bring about awareness in the body. His method called “Grammar of the Feet,” focuses on the one body part that is in constant contact with the ground: our feet. Suzuki’s theatre is enormously informed by the theatre of Japan. Kabuki and noh theatres are discussed countless times within his works and they inform much of his theatrical writings. His writings call for fellow actors and practitioners of the theatre to understand the older Japanese traditions as a basis of understanding the trends of the modern theatre in Japan. Like Chekhov’s To the Actor, Suzuki’s method has also received world wide acclaim. J. Thomas Rimer, the translator of Suzuki’s book The Way of Acting, writes:

Tadashi Suzuki, is one of the foremost figures in the contemporary theatre, has long been acclaimed, first in his native Japan, then in Europe and the United States, for the striking intensity, beauty, and communal energy of his theatrical productions. Those who have seen them will quickly surmise the behind the always powerful encounters that Suzuki engineers between his actors and his audiences lie both a philosophy of performance and a rigorous discipline that are unique[ . . .]Suzuki’s writings reveal the psychology of a thoroughly contemporary art. Challenged to absorb ideas from a wide variety of sources, he works to create a powerful synthesis of the dramatic arts. (vii)

In one aspect of Suzuki actor training, he discusses two distinct ideas of energy, animal energy and non-animal energy. Allain discusses the importance of Suzuki’s understanding about
he body, he writes, “A key concept in Suzuki’s theatre is ‘animal energy’. In broad terms, he wishes to conjure in performance the equivalent of the gods in kabuki and noh, but he uses this more ‘pagan’ notion to describe his rerooting” (4). In another description, Allain discusses the importance of animal energy to theatre practice. He writes, “The concept of animal energy recognises an essential characteristic of performing – the need for the performer to survive on the stage rather than ‘die’[. . .] Encouraging animalistic sensitivity shifts the performance away from being an aesthetic entertainment and towards a transgressive interactive event” (5). According to Suzuki’s philosophy, theatre is more than the body of the actor or the audience member watching the show. The air that surrounds the body is alive with the energies emanated from the bodies of all that are in the theatre space, both actor and audience. For Suzuki, different energies are perpetually at play within the theatre, some created and some natural. Lights, microphones, and other electrical mechanisms each have their own unique energy, and according to Suzuki, these man made energies affect the actors, the audience and the overall atmosphere of the performance in a negative way. Because of the presence and power of the non-animal energies that exist in Japanese theatre, Suzuki created the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT) which sought to be removed completely from those non-animal energies. The theatre space is a renovated farmhouse in the middle of the Japanese countryside. In this secluded environment Suzuki asks the actors to focus and develop a relationship with the ground and their own energies, unchallenged by outside influences that may well hamper the deep sensitivities he is seeking to call forth from the actors. “Grammar of the Feet” was designed by Suzuki to help find the connection with the ground to build within the actor’s body a greater understanding and awareness of the different levels of sensitivities that exist within that body. Suzuki and his directing style have developed
such popularity that he and well-known American director Anne Bogart opened an actor training facility in Saratoga, New York called the Saratoga International Theatre Institute (SITI).

On the surface, each of the writers discussed herein displays an attitude about the body that seems to suggest that awareness is necessary for the development of a healthy functional body. Feldenkrais writes:

> The execution of an action by no means proves that we know, even superficially, what we are doing or how we are doing it. If we attempt to carry out an action with awareness—that is, to follow it in detail—we will soon discover that even the simplest and most common of actions, such as getting up from a chair, is a mystery, and that we have no idea at all of how it is done. (46)

Approaching acting through conscious observation of the body as Feldenkrais suggests eventually trains the actor to actively study the muscles being used in every movement of the body. This develops in the actor the ability to use the body proficiently and powerfully; the smallest details of the body come to be felt and understood. In To the Actor, Chekhov’s describes possible results of his third exercise and notes that, if properly executed, “This exercise will constantly enable you to create forms for what-ever you do on the stage. You will develop a taste for form and will be artistically dissatisfied with any movements that are vague and shapeless, or with amorphous gestures, speech, thoughts, feelings and will impulses when you encounter them in yourself and others during your professional work.” (10). Chekhov states that following and continuing this exercise, the actor will not only become more aware of the body but, more aware of other actors around that body. Much like Stanislavski, Chekhov also implies in this statement that it is a necessary aspect of the actor’s craft to constantly study the self.
Whether it is studying simple body movements, the movement throughout a whole scene, or
movements associated with daily existence, one’s attention should be focused on the movements
of the body. In a similar manner, Suzuki’s also seeks a greater observation and sensitivity of the
actor’s interior body. Suzuki writes about the benefits of the exercises in his method “Grammar
of the Feet”: “The exercises are intended as a means to discover a self-consciousness of the
interior of the body, and the actor’s success in doing them confirms his ability to make that
discovery. The actor learns to become conscious of the many layers of sensitivity within his own
body.” (12). Suzuki discusses in this passage that there are several “layers of sensitivity” that
exist in the body. The actor should strive to know these layers of sensitivities to become an
effective upon the stage. Within these three quotes it is clear why these individuals are important
figures in understanding and bringing about bodily awareness. Each writer brings a unique and
personal perspective to the importance of bodily awareness, not only for the acting profession,
but for the health of the body as well.

It is clear that both Suzuki and Chekhov value a physical approach to the work upon the
stage. The body is the most important and utilized tool at the actor’s disposal. The actor is
wholly dependent on the functioning of the body to be able to meet the psychological and
physical demands of the character. To further demonstrate the importance of bodily awareness in
the acting craft, two examples from my early education in performance will demonstrate how a
hampered body leads to the breakdown in communication or confusion between the actor and the
audience.

My first example is an experience from my junior year in high school. I was to deliver a
speech in front of my entire high school for the American Legion’s oratorical contest. I had not
thought of public speaking as something that particularly interested me. However, I agreed to
enter this contest under the advice of a trusted teacher and mentor. There were many problems that arose with my first engagement with an audience of five to six hundred students, faculty, and staff. First, I had no technique for memorization and not knowing the material well enough was perhaps the first detrimental blow. Though, perhaps I would have been able to recall more had my body not gone stiff with nervous terror the moment I stepped on to the stage. With no true understanding of my body, I began to speak. Although I was audible and I had sufficiently memorized the first half of my speech, my body behaved oddly in this state of shock. I began to pace back and forth very quickly. Instead of listening to my speech, I could see the heads of the audience tracking my movements back and forth as if at a tennis match. As I reached the latter part of the speech, my body, still within the throws of nervousness, continued its relentless pacing. I continued through the speech, even though I had forgotten some of the key points. As I finished the speech and left the stage, I nearly fell to the floor from the fevered behavior of my body. I took third place in a competition with only three contestants. I did not know at the time that these were common problems that many public speakers face. More importantly, I made no connection that my hampered nervous body was the chief factor in my inability to fully communicate my ideas to the audience.

My next example comes from my involvement in a production of *Amadeus* during my freshman year at college. Early in the pre-production phase, my audition was disadvantaged by the same inability to control the nervous energy of my body. Despite the shortcomings in my acting technique, I was cast in role of Salieri’s Valet, as well as a few other non-speaking ensemble parts. Since the valet was a non-speaking role, that allowed me the luxury of being in front of an audience with none of the pressures of having to act, or so I believed at the time. What I did not know then is that every aspect of my body told the story of my character. Many of
my movements throughout the performances, whether it was the valet or one of my other ensemble roles, were approached with a very superficial understanding of the job of the actor. Although, I followed the director’s instructions on my character, I had no appreciation for how much focus of mind even a non-speaking role requires. On the night of the last performance, the actor that played Salieri’s cook had an allergic reaction to makeup and had to be rushed to the hospital. This meant that at the end of the play when Salieri’s slits his own throat, I would have to walk on stage, see Salieri, scream, and then run off. I was confident that I would have no problems with this task. However, when it came time to walk out on stage and scream, my body decided that it was against this plan. Instead of a loud audible scream coming from my lips, the tenseness of my body only allowed me to whisper a barely audible “no.” This time my hampered body did not allow me to share with the audience the horror experienced by my character at that moment. Because of my inability to scream the moment was cheapened. Rather than sharing with the audience the horror of Salieri slitting his throat, I shared only my tense and unprepared body.

These are just two examples from my early performance career that demonstrate the importance developing bodily awareness for the actor. Had I either understood or been trained in Chekhov’s method or Suzuki’s method, perhaps I would have been prepared for whatever might have occurred when I walked out onto the stage. I could have maintained control over my body, not allowing nervousness to cause me to pace back and forth during my speech. As well, I would have been able to walk out onto the stage at the end of *Amadeus* and scream at the top of my lungs, unrestrained.

Bodily awareness is paramount for the actor to be able to fully and effortlessly communicate the ideas of the production to the audience. In the writings of Michael Chekhov
and Tadashi Suzuki both discuss the importance of bodily awareness and its necessity to the craft of acting. The work of both Chekhov and Suzuki are still being taught and utilized around the world. They have both had enormous success as actor trainers/directors and their legacies will continue to influence theatre for generations to come. I hope that this study will in some regard or another demystify both actor training methods and make them more accessible for the training actor.
CHAPTER 1

MOSHÉ FELデンクラIS AND BODILY AWARENESS

Feldenkrais’s systematic breakdown and defining of human physiology, combined with the simple exercises in the latter portion of his book, stimulate a holistic understanding of how to use one’s body efficiently and effectively. In essence, the bodily awareness presented by Feldenkrais does not directly discuss the theatre or actor training. However, it is an excellent approach for the young actor to begin the work of understanding the body. His method has been incorporated into theatre through such artists as Peter Brook, who used the Feldenkrais Method in combination with other methods and forms to develop bodily awareness within his actors. According to Colin Counsell, “preparatory training for Brook’s actors at the CIRT included [. . .] western techniques such as Moshe Feldenkrais’s system of movement” (155). There are other methods that deal with the development of bodily awareness, however, the Feldenkrais Method, unlike some other programs, is an intensive, science driven approach to a physiological study of the human body. The well-rounded nature of his inquiry into the body makes his research an invaluable tool to study the awareness training in Chekhov’s and Suzuki’s actor training systems.

If properly followed, Moshe Feldenkrais’s book Awareness Through Movement does lead to greater bodily awareness. This awareness is ultimately beneficial to the health of the body, but, above and beyond general health, awareness leads to a state of understanding the body that is necessary for the craft of the actor. The importance of developing bodily awareness is most clearly stated by Feldenkrais. He writes:
A person who lies on his back and tries to sense his entire body systematically—that is, turning his attention to every limb and part of the body in turn—finds that certain sections respond easily, while others remain mute or dulled and beyond the range of his awareness [. . .] A person who cannot sing at all cannot feel this function in his self-image except by an effort of intellectual extrapolation. He is not aware of any vital connection between the hollow space in his mouth and his ear or his breathing, as the singer does. A man who cannot jump will not be aware of those parts of the body involved that are clearly defined to a man who is able to jump. (Feldenkrais 21)

To extend this metaphor to the craft of acting, an actor needs to understand how to utilize the voice much like that of a singer. The voice is of the utmost importance to an actor portraying a character on the stage. If an actor is unaware of the mechanisms of the voice, the character may not be heard; the actor may have shortness of breath during longer speeches as well as risk undue strain upon the vocal cords. In the worst case scenario, depending how strenuous the demands of the role are, the actor will do permanent damage to the voice. To be aware of the body and understand how it works enables the actor in every way to reach the highest potential of the actor’s performing instrument.

In his book, Feldenkrais approaches the study of the body assuming that the body is not already being used to its fullest potential. Essentially, Feldenkrais understands that people need to correct the use of the body to be able to reach a healthy balanced state. These systems of correction according to Feldenkrais have been utilized throughout history to improve the human existence. He states:
The problem of human correction—either through others or by one’s own efforts—has preoccupied man throughout history. Many systems were devised for this purpose. The various religions have tried to describe ways of behavior intended to bring about man’s improvement. Different systems of analysis are intended to assist man to free himself from deep-seeded compulsions in his behavior. ‘Esoteric’—that is, ‘internal’—systems practiced in Tibet, India, and Japan, and used in all periods of human history, have also influenced Judaism. The cabalists, Hassidim, and the less-known practitioners of ‘Mussar’ (moralists) were influenced by Zen and Raja Yoga than appears at first sight. (30)

In short, human beings throughout history have sought a method of correction and many of these methods have been studied through several different areas of research, including medicine, religion, philosophy, and theatre, as well as many other disciplines.

“Awareness” is an ambiguous term, often used out of context according to Feldenkrais. Awareness is made possible in the human species by the unique qualities of the mind. In the particular way that the human brain has developed, there is a purposeful interruption of communication between different sections of the mind that allows time for the decision making process to occur. To be reflective of the self is a function of our upper brain system, a cognition that is more highly developed in the human animal than any other. Due to the relationship of the different systems of the brain, we as humans have the ability to think of an action without necessarily executing that particular action. He suggests that this ability to observe one’s self allows our species the chance to take an active position in the directing the path of our lives. According to Feldenkrais, self-reflection occurs because of the relationship of the upper brain to
the motor cortex. The human upper brain is connected to the motor cortex through direct nerve pathways as well as indirectly through older brain systems, he writes:

    The nerve paths in the third brain system are longer and more elaborate than the two older systems. Most of the operations of the third system are carried out through the agency of the other two, although there are paths for the third system to exercise direct control over the executing mechanisms. The indirect process causes delay in the action itself, so that ‘Think first, act later’ is not just a saying.

    There is a delay between what is engendered in the Supralymbic system and its execution by the body. This delay between a thought process and its translation into action is long enough to make it possible to inhibit it. This possibility of creating the image of an action and then delaying its execution—postponing it or preventing it altogether—is the basis of imagination and intellectual judgment. (45)

The last section of this quote reveals the importance of being aware of the body. It is the built-in delay of thought that gives the human mind the ability to postpone action, which in turn, allows our species to be cognizant of the body. It is cognition that is the basis for our “imagination and intellectual judgment.” In many regards, imagination and judgment are considered some of the most prized facilities that our species possesses. It is from these faculties that humans have acquired the ability to create art. These abilities of the mind are utilized in almost every aspect of theatre from the development of the design concept to the final performance. Without these functions of the upper brain, we, as a species, could have never developed the societies in which
our species lives today. The existence of the theatre within any society wholly depends upon the imaginative and judgment-laden human mind.

In the passage quoted above, Feldenkrais supplies the reader with the knowledge of how awareness is possible within our species. Some level of awareness exists in all people, developed to a lesser or greater degree depending upon the individual. Awareness according to Feldenkrais, is an internal system within the body, that if exercised exponentially builds upon itself. This happens in the body due to the interconnected nature of the different nerve pathways of the mind. With this understanding of the body, the small amount of awareness that exists in many people can be utilized to develop even deeper levels of bodily awareness. Feldenkrais believes that there is no limit to human potential, and through constant observation and exercising of the body one can expect to develop awareness with increasing ease and constant growth. Through the examination of the psychology and physiology of the human body within Feldenkrais’s text, the reader has in essence already begun to bring about greater awareness of the self. From the unique and thorough understanding of developing bodily awareness as presented in Feldenkrais’s book, I will be able to come to understand a suitable method for examining those writings concerning Chekhov’s and Suzuki’s methods.

Awareness as described by Feldenkrais is above and beyond simple consciousness. For many individuals a common misconception concerning awareness is that there is no distinction between consciousness and awareness. Feldenkrais states why there is a clear distinction between the two:

There is an essential difference between consciousness and awareness, although the borders are not clear in our use of language. I can walk up the stairs of my house, fully conscious of what I am doing, and yet not
know how many steps I have climbed. In order to know how many there are I must climb them a second time, pay attention, listen to myself, and count them. Awareness is consciousness together with a realization of what is happening within it or of what is going on within ourselves while we are conscious. (50)

Even though we are conscious as we go about our lives, this does not constitute awareness. According to Feldenkrais, awareness is distinct from consciousness because when a body is simply conscious, there is neither introspection nor outward observation. Therefore, the first criterion to build awareness in the body appears to stem from active observing of the body’s movements. The understanding Feldenkrais offers in this book is a self-reflective study of the links that exist between the organic drives of the human body and how they combine with observation of external human behavior to develop the individual human. The combination of these two aspects of the body, the internal and external observation creates the image that we understand as ourselves. Feldenkrais describes the component parts of the self-image as follows:

Our self-image consists of four components that are involved in every action: movement, sensation, feeling, and thought. The contribution of each of the components to any particular action varies, just as the persons carrying out the action vary, but each component will be present to some extent in any action. (Feldenkrais 10)

Feldenkrais suggests that within any action, movement, sensation, feelings and thought are being utilized by the body. These four components of action are very important to Feldenkrais’s theory of building bodily awareness. It is through movement that he proposes that the other three components of action will be engaged to develop bodily awareness.
Feldenkrais is able to include any and all movement within the combination of all the components of action. For instance, a task as simple as sitting down utilizes all the components of action. Sitting, of course, is a direct utilization of movement, but before one sits down there is need to use sight or touch to locate a suitable place to sit down. By doing this the component of sensation is utilized. The act of searching with the eyes or feeling about to find a suitable place to sit uses judgment or thought. The very place chosen to sit is usually directly related to how comfortable the individual perceives the chair or sitting implement to be. Even with an action that seems very simple, all of these components of action are utilized. These components of action are fundamental to Feldenkrais’s method and therefore feeling, sensation, thought, and movement will be instrumental in the examination Chekhov’s and Suzuki’s work.

It is the interconnectedness of these components allows us to experience the universe around us, which in turn, informs and creates our self-image. Each of the components is dependent upon the other components to operate, so in a sense these components already function as one unit. Feldenkrais claims:

The exclusion of any one of the four components is justified only in speech; in reality, not a moment passes in the waking state in which all man’s capacities are not employed together. It is impossible, for instance, for you to recall an event, person, or landscape without using at least one of the senses—sight, hearing, or taste—to recapture the memory together with your self-image at the time, such as your position, your age, appearance, action, or pleasant or unpleasant feelings. (32)
Feldenkrais notes that sensation, feeling, and thought are distinctly different in each individual and since those components operate from within the interior of the body, the only plausible way to study those components is made possible through observation of movement, he states:

> While from a distance the life of one person appears to be very similar to that of any other, on close inspection they are entirely different. We must, then, use words and concepts in such a way that they apply more or less equally to everyone. We confine ourselves therefore to the examining of the motor part of self-image. Instinct, feeling and thought being linked with movement, their role in the creation of the self-image reveals itself together with that movement (12).

These components of action then represent the elemental developing aspects of the human mind, so basic that Feldenkrais considers them common to most, if not all, human beings. The exception to this is individuals that have brain damage. They may not be able to fully utilize movement due to the nature of the damage. Movement is the filter through which human sensations, feelings, and thoughts become evident to the outside observer. Therefore, movement is not only the means through which we gain access to self-awareness, but movement is also the means through which the three other components of action can be truly exercised and strengthened.

Feldenkrais is convinced that movement is the best method to correct the over-all posture of the body. It is through corrective movements that the body is able to bring into balance the other components of action: feeling, senses, and thought. Feldenkrais writes that when this balance occurs:
Awareness succeeds in being at one with feelings, senses, movement, and thought, the carriage will speed along on the right road. Then man can make discoveries, invent, create, innovate, and ‘know.’ He grasps that his small world and the great world around are but one and that in this unity he is no longer alone (54).

It is finally all the components of action working in union with each other, for each other, that leads to the continued development of bodily awareness. Through the continuous conscious observation of movement an understanding develops about the interconnected nature of our movement to our feelings, senses, and thoughts until finally they all coalesce into one undivided body, fully aware of the world around it.

For Feldenkrais, there needs to be intensive observation of the movements of that body to be able to properly build awareness within the body. Any exercises need to incorporate through movement one or all of the other components of action. It is through these movement exercises that the other components: sensations, feelings, and thoughts are perpetually strengthened, which should lead the practitioner of the exercises towards the development of body awareness.

As an example of how exacting Feldenkrais movement exercises can be I have included below a description as outlined in his book. Feldenkrais writes:

Lie down on your back. Place your legs a comfortable distance apart.
Stretch your arms above your head, slightly apart, so that the left arm will be approximately in a straight line with the right leg and the right arm in line with the left leg.
Close your eyes and try to check the areas of the body that are in contact with the floor. Pay attention to the manner in which the heels lie on the
floor, whether the pressure upon them is equal, and whether the point of contact is at exactly the same points at both heels. In the same way examine the contact made with the floor by the calf muscles, the back of the knees, the hip joints, the floating ribs, the upper ribs, and the shoulder blades. Pay attention to the respective distances between the shoulders, elbows, wrists, and the floor. (91)

Even within this beginning exercise intensive observation of the movement is a necessary aspect of Feldenkrais’s method. These exacting instructions in this exercise ensure that every part of body that contacts the floor is scrutinized. This exacting observation of the body is instrumental to understanding how precise and focused a student must become to even fundamentally accomplish what Feldenkrais has outlined within his book. Exacting observation of movement is the chief reason that Feldenkrais’s method is an exceptional tool to examine the work of Chekhov and Suzuki.
CHAPTER 2

MICHAEL CHEKHOV: TO THE ACTOR AND BODILY AWARENESS

By examining Michael Chekhov’s *To the Actor* using the components of action: movement, sensation, feeling, and thought as discussed by Feldenkrais in *Awareness Through Movement*, I hope to determine if Chekhov’s writings incorporates into his training all the components of action that Feldenkrais states are necessary to build bodily awareness. I also expect that scrutinizing Chekhov’s writing in this way will lead to a better understanding of the base-line principles that operate within Chekhov’s process of actor training. Through this discussion, I hope to demonstrate that such body-centered methods should be a central component of contemporary actor training. In the following chapter, the analysis of the Chekhov’s writings will essentially be in sequential order, following the progression of the exercises in the book.

*To the Actor*, by Michael Chekhov, is precisely as the title suggests, a book designed for the development of the actor, using a wide range of exercises designed to awaken the actor’s body and mind. Chekhov believed that the exercises in this book should build upon each other, to eventually create a total utilization and understanding of the actor’s body. Chekhov’s approach to the body of the actor focuses upon the awakening of and utilization of the imagination. Thus, it would seem that his initial approach differs from that of Moshé Feldenkrais’s method. However, it is the ends sought by both methods that make these ideologies compatible. They both seek unification of the human body as one with no divide between body and mind. Both Chekhov and Feldenkrais work in the same medium, the human body, but they are simply approaching that
body from different perspectives. Feldenkrais actuates the mind (sensations, feelings and thought) through movement thus creating union of the body, whereas Chekhov begins with the psychology (mind) then utilizes that thought to create movement. Simply put, Chekhov begins his quest utilizing thought first, and then movement, as opposed to Feldenkrais who begins with movement. Movement is of course a large part of the work within Chekhov’s book, but movement is put into action through the active use of the imagination.

Demonstrating the over-all importance to his acting approach, the first topic Chekhov chooses to discuss is “The Actor’s Body and Psychology.” In this chapter, he discusses the troubles of the mind/body divide. He writes, “It is a known fact that the human body and psychology influence each other and are in constant interplay. Either an undeveloped or musccularly overdeveloped body may easily dim the activity of the mind, dull the feelings or weaken the will” (1). It seems as if he agrees entirely with the principles of Feldenkrais, in that he understands that thought, sensation, and feeling (all aspects of our psychology) are wholly connected to movement and the human body. Chekhov continues, “the actor, who must consider his body as an instrument for the expressing of creative ideas on the stage, must strive for the attainment of the complete harmony between the two, body and psychology” (1). Undoubtedly the root of Chekhov’s process seeks to find union within the body, but unlike Feldenkrais, he does not attempt to define and breakdown the physiologic processes of the human body; rather, Chekhov investigates uniting the self through the imaginative exploration of the body and mind. Like Feldenkrais, Chekhov believed that thoughtless physical exercise was unproductive for the training the body. To truly understand the body and its workings one must continually scrutinize the body and its actions.
The key aspect to Chekhov’s approach stems from what he calls the requirements of the acting profession. There are three requirements according to Chekhov, the first of which is ultimately important when examining the awareness training present within his writings. He writes:

What are the requirements? First and foremost is extreme sensitivity of body to the psychological creative impulses. This cannot be achieved by strictly physical exercises. The psychology itself must take part in such a development. The body of an actor must absorb psychological qualities, must be filled and permeate with them so that they convert gradually into a sensitive membrane, a kind of receiver and conveyer of the subtlest images, feelings, emotions and will impulses. (Chekhov 2)

This passage illustrates that for Chekhov the development of an extreme psychological sensitivity is a necessity for the training actor. By exercising those sensitivities of the body, the actor is able to further develop aspects of the psychology. In the training, sensitivities become developed so acutely that the actor is able to receive and communicate even the subtlest of impulses that occur within the body.

His second requirement is “the richness of psychology itself.” He further states that, “A sensitive body and a rich, colorful psychology are mutually complementary to each other and create that harmony so necessary to the attainment of the actor’s professional aim” (4). Chekhov again discusses the union of both body and mind which leads to an over-all “harmony” necessary for the craft of acting. In essence, his requirement of a rich psychology is very similar to Feldenkrais’s understanding that all of the components of action are intrinsically linked and that to reach a balance, those components should be evenly exercised, uniting the mind and the body.
The third and final requirement that Chekhov describes is not an easy requirement to fill, but indeed, it is a necessary one for every training actor. He writes:

The third requirement is complete obedience of both body and psychology to the actor. The actor who would become master of himself and his craft will banish the elements of “accident” from his profession and create firm ground for his talent. Only an indisputable command of his body and psychology will give him the necessary self-confidence, freedom and harmony for his creative activity. (5)

From these passages it becomes apparent that Chekhov seeks to develop a bodily awareness similar to that discussed by Feldenkrais. Though the approaches they take to obtain a unified body may differ, examining Chekhov’s exercises with the understanding of training awareness provided by Feldenkrais will illuminate how Chekhov’s system combines work with movement, sensation, feelings, and thought to develop an unified, whole body.

Exercise one begins with “a series of wide, broad but simple movements” (5). These movements are of particular interest because, according to Feldenkrais, movement is the first necessary step in the development of awareness. During this exercise, in addition to scrutinizing the body and its movement, Chekhov is interested in connecting the movements to the other components of action. He suggests:

Open yourself completely, spreading wide your arms and hands, your legs far apart. Remain in this expanded position for a few seconds. Imagine that you are becoming larger and larger [. . .] Repeat the same movement several times. Keep in mind the aim of this exercise, saying to
yourself, “I am going to awaken the sleeping muscles of my body; I am going to revive and use them.” (6)

Using different movements in conjunction with active thinking, Chekhov seeks to connect the actor’s mind to one of the other components of action: sensation. The key word in this exercise is “imagine.” Chekhov asks the actor to use his imagination, in combination with the movement and breathing, so that this “will gradually give you a glimmer of the sensations of freedom and increased life” (6). Although not directly stated by Chekhov, this exercise seems to follow Feldenkrais’s understanding that the components of action are all intricately tied together, and utilizing one or more of the components of action may lead to greater development of the less-used components. By combining the components of movement and thought in exercise one Chekhov hopes to stir the sensations of the body; sensations that, Chekhov argues, are integral to the development of the actor’s craft. In this first exercise Chekhov trains the actor to strengthen the connection between the body and the thought processes. In strengthening that connection between movement and thought, the actor is encouraged to scrutinize the sensations that are stirred through that movement and thought. It is a process of training interdependent parts of the psyche, so that the exercising of one of the parts exercises another, which in turn exercises the primary part of the psyche. Chekhov creates these cycles of development in the majority of his exercises. He uses movement and thought to lead the discovery of sensations and feelings. In later exercises he switches the components, asking the actor to start with a sensation or feeling and return it to movement. This understanding is similar to the assertions that Feldenkrais makes when discussing the development of the components of action in the human body. Due to the interconnected nature of our thoughts, movements, feelings, and sensations, exercising one of the components, invariably involves and exercises all the components.
In exercise two, Chekhov asks the actor to imagine an energy emanating from/through the chest, while continuing the same “series of wide, broad but simple movements” from exercise one. Chekhov again asks the actor to engage the imagination for this exercise. He writes, “Imagine that within your chest there is a center from which flows the actual impulses for all your movements. Think of this imaginary center as the source of inner activity and power within your body. Send this power into your head, arms, hands, torso, legs and feet” (7). It is in Chekhov’s conception of the powerful center that he truly begins to utilize the same combinations described by Feldenkrais. Scrutinized movement of the body which incorporates movement and thought leads to sensations of power and energy within the body. At an early stage in his book he is incorporating all the components of action that build bodily awareness. He uses movement and thought to augment sensations; once those sensations are thoughtfully practiced they should lead to greater development of feeling. He articulates this aspect at the end of exercise two, when he states, “The imaginary center in your chest will also give you the sensation that your whole body is approaching, as it were, an ‘ideal’ type of human body[. . .]. So continue these exercises until you feel that the powerful center within your chest is a natural part of you” (8). Chekhov clearly states here that it is from the imagining (thought) and the movements that sensations emerge. If those sensations are practiced, according to Chekhov, it will lead to the development of feelings associated with the discovery of the “powerful center” that exists within the body. These first two exercises ask the student actor to use the imagination to engage the movements of the body to further develop both sensation and feeling. The work that continues throughout this book is dependent upon these primary exercises being thoroughly practiced before continuing on to the other exercises.
In many regards exercise three is a continuation of exercise two, only Chekhov demands a greater level of scrutiny as well as a greater utilization of the body. Specifically, in this exercise he focuses attention on the hands and fingers. Chekhov asks the actor to begin this exercise like the others, using the broad sweeping movements of the whole body. While scrutinizing the moments of the body, the actor should “mold” the air around the body with movements that have a clear beginning, middle, and end. After it has been developed, the actor is to repeat the movement until it can be accomplished with as little effort as possible. Chekhov complicates this exercise further when he asks for use and observation of the whole body. While continuing the well-practiced form, he asks the actor to produce the same movement using different body parts. He writes, “Then try to reproduce these movements by using only different parts of the body: mold the air around you with only your shoulders and shoulder blades, then with your back, your elbows, knees, forehead, hands, fingers, etc. In all these movements preserve the sensation of strength and inner power flowing through and out of your body” (9). Through isolating the different parts of the body, Chekhov is further developing the actors’ ability to cultivate and utilize the energy in all the parts of the body not just the chest. For his method to have a cumulative affect Chekhov asks the actor to return to the ideas introduced in the first three exercises. He states: “return to simple natural movements and everyday business, using the center and preserving, as well as combining, the sensation of strength, molding power and form” (9). As these exercises build upon each other so does the relationship between the components of action, which continue to strengthen each other due to their interconnected nature. Likewise, he ends this exercise by incorporating movement, thought and sensation. He writes:

When coming in contact with different objects, try to pour your strength into them, to fill them with your power. This will develop your ability to handle the
objects (hand props on the stage) with utmost skill and ease. Likewise, learn to extend this power to your partners (even at a distance); it will become one of the simplest means of establishing true and firm contacts with those on the stage [. . .] Spend your power lavishly; it is inexhaustible, and the more you give, the more it will accumulate in you. (9)

In just this small section of text, the chief components of action being integrated are thought and sensation; although there is implied movement with handling different objects, Chekhov’s focus is on using thought to simulate the sensation of channeling one’s energy into props as well as towards other actors upon the stage. He ends this exercise with detailed finger and hand work. According to Chekhov, “An actor’s hands and fingers can be very expressive on the stage if well developed, sensitive and economically used” (10). For this reason he asks the actor to engage in a series of movements that involve taking, placing, and/or lifting of different sized objects.

Scrutinizing and practicing these movements will lead to a level of refinement in the over-all movement of the body in which the actor “will develop a taste for form and will be artistically dissatisfied with any movements that are vague and shapeless, or with amorphous gestures, speech, thoughts, feelings and will impulses when you encounter them in yourself.” (10). He also suggests that these hand and finger exercises should be used following exercises four, five and six to continue to build the “taste for form.” Chekhov’s continual observation and analysis of movement bares a strong resemblance to Feldenkrais’s description of how to build awareness in the body. By using the thought processes to observe the movements and sensations of the body, Chekhov continues to strengthen the ability to feel and utilize the energies of the body.

Exercises four, five, and six are also based in the imagination combined with broad sweeping movements that become simpler movements towards the end of the exercises. Each
exercise is striving towards full body awareness through engagement of the body and mind. In exercise four, Chekhov asks the actor to imagine floating in space. Chekhov proposes that if properly executed within this exercise, using movement and imagination (thought) one should achieve “A sensation of calm, poise and psychological warmth” (10). Chekhov continues using movement and thought to achieve different sensations within the body. In exercise five, he asks the actor to imagine that they are flying through the air and to allow this feeling to be evident in the movements of the body. He is utilizing imagination (thought) to activate feelings in the body that should be expressed through movement. Interestingly, Chekhov shifts the utilization of the components of action in this exercise. He does this by asking the actor to use thoughts and feelings of flying to stimulate light and carefree sensations. He writes

| You may come to a static position outwardly, but inwardly you must continue your feeling of still soaring aloft […] Your desire must be to overcome the weight of your body, to fight the law of gravity. While moving, change tempos. A sensation of joyful lightness and easiness will permeate your entire body. (To the actor 11) |

This exercise does not involve constant movement throughout. By removing the movement aspect of the exercise, Chekhov is allowing the connections between feelings, sensations, and thoughts to development independently of movement. Only after fully internalizing the sensations and feelings of flying does Chekhov ask the actor start to move again, but the purposeful denial of movement forces the actor to use and strengthen the other components independently.
In a sense, like Feldenkrais, Chekhov describes the inner connectedness of the components of action which, after being thoroughly practiced, can develop into actual feelings rather than just imagination (thought).

Exercise six is a continuation of exercises two and three because he asks the actor to radiate energy from the body. In this exercise, Chekhov gives indication of how his system can move the actor from thinking or imagining the radiation of the body to the actual being able to cultivate and utilize the energies of the body. He writes, “You must not be disturbed with doubts as to whether you are actually radiating or whether you are only imagining that you are. If you sincerely and convincingly imagine that you are sending out rays, the imagination will gradually and faithfully lead you to the real and actual process of radiating” (12). In this passage it is clear that Chekhov believes that through use of movement and imagination (thought), given the proper amount of time training, it is possible to actually radiate energy from the body. This ability is realized through all of Feldenkrais’s components of action. It is the interconnectedness of those components of action that stimulates the growth of one or all the components through the use of the others. I am reminded of the earlier quote by Feldenkrais that echoes this understanding of the interconnectedness of the components of action, when he writes, “The exclusion of any one of the four components is justified only in speech; in reality, not a moment passes in the waking state in which all man’s capacities are not employed together” (Feldenkrais 32). Both Chekhov and Feldenkrais seem to share the understanding that the inner workings of the body and mind, in actuality, are not divided within the body, but operate as a whole. Continuing the examination of Chekhov’s exercises, he further develops the use of all the components of action so that the actor is able to reach this understanding of the body as a whole.
In exercise seven, Chekhov reviews the four types of movements that are important to continue developing bodily awareness. “Molding, floating, flying and radiating” are all movements that through continual practice more fully relate the body to the environment around it (13). Using movement to acclimate the body to the environment that surrounds it, these exercises also strengthen the pathways of the mind for creative thought combined with the components of sensation and feeling the inner body eventually comes to realize an understanding of body and mind as one. With the notion of the entire body as one entity, Chekhov continues the discussion of what he refers to as the four qualities that exist in any great work of art. He writes:

In every true, great piece of art you will always find four qualities which the artist has put into his creation: *Ease, Form, Beauty, and Entirety*. These four qualities must also be developed by the actor; his body and speech must be endowed with them because they are the only instruments available to him on the stage. His body must become a piece of art within itself, must acquire these four qualities, must experience them inwardly.” (13)

All of these qualities are aspects of the body that develop out of those initial exercises of Chekhov’s system. The “ease” that Chekhov speaks of in this passage, refers to the masterful fluidity of the body which should underlie all the work done by the actor on the stage. To develop this masterful fluidity, Chekhov suggests that the actor continue to work on the “Flying” and “Radiating” movements. The early exercises in which Chekhov asks the actor to use movement and imagination to further develop sensation and feeling are used throughout his process. Using the sensations and feelings that are wrought from the continual practice of the flying and radiating exercises, Chekhov reverses his earlier process. He begins with and uses
feelings and sensations to further strengthen or develop the pathways of movement and thought. This allows the actor to utilize created sensations and feelings, translating them back into movement upon the stage. As discussed by Chekhov, “form” and “ease” are developed in the body in a similar way. Both develop through continual practice of the earlier exercises. To develop a highly attuned sense of “form” he suggests continuing practice on the earlier molding exercises. These molding exercises, continually practiced, lead to the creation of clear and defined forms that gradually becomes clearer and more well-defined through the utilization of all Feldenkrais’s components of action. Chekhov’s use of the word “Beauty” is a more complicated term than is able to be described within the conditions of the components of action. In chapter eight Chekhov discusses “Beauty,” as he writes:

Begin with observations of all kinds of beauty in human beings (putting aside sensuousness as negative), in art and in nature, however obscure and insignificant the beautiful feature in them may be. Then ask yourself: ‘Why does it strike me as beautiful? Because of its form? Harmony? Sincerity? Simplicity? Color? Moral value? Strength? Gentleness? Significance? Originality? Ingenuity? Selflessness? Idealism? Mastery?’ etc. As a result of long and patient processes of observation, you will notice that a sense of true beauty and fine artistic taste gradually becomes responsive in you. You will feel that your mind and body have accumulated beauty and that you have sharpened your ability to detect it anywhere. (16)

Beauty, in Chekhov’s estimation, is a culmination of all the components of action. He begins by asking the actor to observe the world around the body, looking for beauty. Although it may seem
as though that observation is a static process, it is completely the opposite. Observation is a very
active process especially the kind of observation that Chekhov suggests. Movement of the eyes
and the head are required while looking for beauty or at the very least movement is needed in the
eyes to track moving objects through space, so although observation seems a passive, it is an
active process. Aside from the movement inherent in the process of observation, Chekhov asks
the actor to use feeling and sensations to locate beauty. If one considers something beautiful, in
some way or another, the object that is considered beautiful creates for the observer a certain
feeling or sensation. So, when Chekhov asks actors to seek out beauty, he is asking them to look
around and find what they feel is beautiful. After engaging movement, feelings, and sensation in
the act of seeking out beauty, the only component of Feldenkrais’s methodology left unused is
thought. The component of thought is used however, the minute that Chekhov asks the actor to
examine those things that are considered to be beautiful. By asking the actor to examine why
something is considered beautiful, the final of the four components is engaged. Making this
observation of beauty another of Chekhov’s exercises that utilizes all of the components of
action, this in turn, strengthens those pathways of the mind to assist in the removal of the body
and mind divide. As the old adage goes, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” however,
Chekhov uses this long-term exercise on the observation of beauty to train the actor’s mind to
not only to refine the sense of beauty but to further strengthen bodily awareness.

In exercise nine he discusses “entirety,” the last of the qualities necessary for the actor’s
craft according to Chekhov (18). Entirety for Chekhov is in part an all-encapsulating
understanding and connection of the beginning, the middle, and the end of any playscript being
worked upon. Ultimately, to create a believable character, the actor needs to follow the lines of
action throughout the story and understand how those lines of action wholly affect the character.
A believable character emerges from within the play through understanding and practicing entirety as Chekhov suggests. Through continual practice of entirety, the actor becomes in tune with the over-all context of the character allowing the motive of the action and action of the character to blend together appropriately throughout the production. In a broader context, entirety can become a metaphor for the over-all end result of his method, the fusing of actor’s psychology and body as one. Before utilization of the exercises in his book, the actor is often inherently troubled with the divide that existed between the psychology and the body. After continually exercising, as Chekhov suggests, the apparent separation between body and mind dissipates and the entirety of the body and mind work together.

Examining this exercise through the lens of Feldenkrais’s work, it is clear that Chekhov begins the exercise with the component of thought, when he asks the reader to “review in your mind, the events of the day just past” (18). In the process of remembering, undoubtedly, sensation and feeling become infused with thought. The recreation of the day’s past events from memory involves remembering the feeling and sensation experienced during that day. By reviewing these moments over and over again in the mind, those feelings and sensations experienced throughout the day are even more deeply ingrained in the mind. Chekhov asks the actor to take these remembered events of the day and “Pretend that they are separate scenes in a play. Define their beginnings and ends. Again and again go over them in your memory until each one stands out as an entity and yet coheres with the others as an entirety” (18). In this exercise, through the use of the psychology, Chekhov employs the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that are involved with the re-experiencing of the memories of that particular day. In the next part of the exercise he suggests to do this same exercise, only this time use “longer periods of your entire life” (18). Locked within an individual’s memory of an event are all those aspects of the
psychology, which Feldenkrais understands as thought, feeling, and sensation. In this exercise Chekhov strengthens those three components. In the last segment of the exercise Chekhov further develops his idea of “entirety” by combining the remembered moments with movement. By the end this exercise with movement Chekhov fully incorporates all of the Feldenkrais’s components of action.

These first nine exercises comprise Chekhov’s first chapter in To the Actor. To accomplish the amount of work that Chekhov suggests in this first chapter is not a short term process. Each of these exercises needs to be practiced again and again and he suggests that the actor revisit and continue to use the earlier exercises throughout the process. All of the exercises discussed thus far do incorporate the components of action as described by Feldenkrais. This means that practice of these exercises will continually reinforce the mental pathways to stimulate and develop the use of all of the components of action: movement, sensation, feeling, and thought. Since Chekhov asks the actor to continually work these exercises throughout the process of training there is a continual stimulation and building of those mental pathways that are important for the ongoing development of awareness of the self and body.

In chapter two, Chekhov continues to develop the four components of action similar to those outlined by Feldenkrais. Some exercises use an individual component to stimulate the whole, while others use several or all components in conjunction. There are only two exercises in this chapter that engage the imagination, approaching the other components of action chiefly through thought. This chapter is titled “Imagination and Incorporation of Images,” giving a strong indication that the component of thought is a large part of the execution of these exercises. In exercise ten, Chekhov suggests opening a book and with a random glance, to pick the first word that appears. Use this word to create an image in your mind. Once the image has been
obtained, he suggests the actor allow that image to come to life within the imagination. Once this is achieved the actor should interact with the image, ask it questions, give it orders, in general complicate the image in the mind and see what begins to happen to that image. Chekhov advocates the use of the component of feeling when he asks the actor to question the image’s psychology. Using the imagination, he asks the actor to visualize what happens to the image when it is sad, happy, or aggravated. By observing these mental images under different emotional conditions, the actor is able to explore the range of emotional pathways that exist in the mind. With practice, there is a continual strengthening of those pathways and the actor develops the ability to better interpret and utilize the sensations and feelings of the body. Chekhov breaks the exercise down further by asking the actor to use imagination to re-create a scene from a play script. After visualizing the scene several times, he asks the actor to use the image created from the script and place that image in different circumstances and observe the differences that appear in the image, given those different circumstances. Although thus far this exercise does not move beyond the processes of the mind according to Chekhov, the training actor should have the ability to call upon the feelings and sensations from within the mind without outside stimulation of movement. He writes, “Therefore, train yourself to watch the images as long as it is necessary to become affected by their emotions, desires, feelings and all else they have to offer; that is, until you yourself begin to feel and wish what your image feels and wishes” (30). Although, Chekhov does not utilize movement in this exercise, its absence seems to be required to explore the depths of the mind properly. In this instance, Chekhov uses intensive thought in the form of imagination along with the absence of movement to stimulate and build those pathways for feeling and sensation.
It is only when the actor begins exercise eleven that physical movement becomes incorporated with the imagined image. Chekhov states that to begin this exercise imagine a movement in your mind; think through all the steps necessary to the complete this movement. After reproducing this action in the mind several times, try to reproduce the movement using the body. Within this exercise Chekhov demonstrates to the actor the divide between thought and actuation of thought in the physical universe. He writes:

Imagine yourself doing, at first, some simple movement: raising your arm, getting up, sitting down or taking an object. Study this movement of yours in your imagination, and then actually fulfill it. Imitate it, as it were, as faithfully as you can. If, when fulfilling it, you notice that your actual movement is not quite that which you saw in your imagination – study it again in your imagination and try it again, until you are satisfied that you have copied it faithfully. (31)

The purpose of this exercise according to Chekhov is that it “will gradually establish those fine connections so necessary to the linking of your vivid imagination with your body, voice, and psychology” (32). In essence, he seeks to strengthen the connection between thought and the other components of action, those same four components of action that Feldenkrais believes are needed to develop a deep awareness of the self.

Chekhov discusses improvisation and ensemble in chapter three. He insists that these aspects of theatre are necessary, both within the individual exercises and group exercises, he helps the actor explore the whole of their body. In exercise twelve, Chekhov suggests that when building an improvisation there is a need for a well-defined beginning and ending as well as the establishment of an overall mood for the scene. These three elements allow for a loose structure
from which the actor can build the improvisation. Chekhov makes several suggestions on how to build the through line of the improvised scene. In a long list of suggestions, he includes the suggestion that the actor could use molding, floating, flying or radiating movements to reach different points of the improvisation. As previously discussed, each of these movements from earlier exercises already incorporates the four components of action as outlined in Feldenkrais’s work. Chekhov writes:

Let each successive movement of your improvisation be a *psychological* (not logical!) result of the moment preceding it [. . .] By doing so you will go through the whole gamut of different sensations, emotions, moods, desires, inner impulses and business, all of which will be found by you spontaneously, on the spot, as it were. (37)

By incorporating and challenging the physical body with the psychological demands of improvisations, the exercises become an attempt to unify and creatively utilize all the components of action: movement, sensations, feelings, and thought. In this regard, the actor continues to approach the work upon the stage with an awareness of the whole body as one. Chekhov also suggests that solo improvisation exercise should be moved to the realm of ensemble work. According to Chekhov, ensemble work is a necessary step to preserving the integrity of the production as a whole. The progression of Chekhov’s work is gradually moving from development of an individual body to the development of a dynamic group body. The ability to work in a group rests wholly upon the development of the body and psychology as one, according to Chekhov.

One of the aims of Chekhov’s exercises then is to train the body and mind to work as one fluid body. Once this fluid body has quashed the implied divisions between the body and
psychology, the next great divide to overcome is the implied divide between individual bodies upon the stage. In the discussion of improvisation and ensemble, it is clear that the very basis of his process is similar to and indeed is a culmination of a holistic understanding of the body’s operations. Much like Feldenkrais’s components of action, Chekhov continues to use movement in conjunction with the three other components of action to bring the actor to an understanding beyond the skin of the body. He writes:

Of course, there are many unifying impulses on the stage, such as the atmosphere of the play, its style, a well-executed performance, or exceptionally fine staging. And yet the true stage ensemble needs more than these consolidations. The actor must develop within himself a sensitivity to the creative impulses of others. (41)

With this in mind, his approach to ensemble work is to develop within the actors sensitivities towards the other actors upon the stage. In terms of Feldenkrais’s method, these exercises are a thorough strengthening of those components of action, essentially using the components of feeling and sensation to guide the movement and thought throughout. He begins the exercise by asking the group members to allow the body, as sincerely as possible, to be inwardly open to the other members in the circle. This openness is accomplished, according to Chekhov, by continually working with imaginative thought and movement which helps the actor to further understand and develop the feelings and sensations in the body. At this point in Chekhov’s work the training actor should have progressed well beyond simply imagining the feeling of giving and receiving energies, and should be actually able to give and receive those energies of the body. He asserts that once this inner contact of the group is established, the actors within the group should establish a series of simple actions. Without verbal disclosure, the group should attempt to
perform the same action as if each actor were part of the same being. He suggests that this will take time and practice to accomplish fluidly, but getting this exercise right every time is not the aim of this exercise. He states, “. . .the real value of this exercise lies in the effort to open one’s self to the others and to intensify the actor’s ability to observe his partners at all times, thus strengthening sensitivity toward the entire ensemble” (43). This is another case where Chekhov is using movement along with feelings and sensations to lead to further development of thought, a thought that revolves around an understanding and utilizing of the whole body, not just in terms of the individual body but, in terms of a body of individuals existing as one entity. If the individual improvisation work requires an awareness of the body as an undivided whole, then ensemble improvisation requires the actor to continue beyond the boundaries of the skin and remove the divide between the bodies. According to Chekhov, working with others requires removing of the different divisions and dichotomies from within the conception of the self as well the removal of the metaphoric walls and divisions that stand between us as human beings.

Chekhov’s quest to train the actor in the bodily awareness as well as an awareness of the theatre space outside the body, continues in chapter four, “Atmospheres and Individual Feelings” (47). Chekhov states that continual practice using different atmospheres will connect the actor to the work as well as the audience in a more significant way to the action upon the stage, asserting:

In the second case, with the atmosphere reigning on stage, your feelings (and not only your intellect) will be stirred and awakened. You will feel the content and very essence of the scene. Your understanding will be broadened by these feelings. The content of the scene will become richer and more significant to your perception. (48)
Within this discussion of atmospheres, Chekhov states that individual feeling contributes to the atmosphere of a scene. These feelings will evolve into a deeper understanding of the sensations and overall mood of the particular scene. This idea relates nicely to Feldenkrais’s understanding of the interplay between the components of action. As one component is developed, so too, it strengthens the other components. It is evident from the passage above that Chekhov recognizes a similar interconnection working between the actors while practicing the use of atmospheres upon the stage.

Chekhov considers that atmosphere is of the utmost importance in the work of the actor. He writes:

> Atmosphere exerts an extremely strong influence upon your acting. Have you ever noticed how, unwittingly, you change your movements, speech, behavior, thoughts and feelings as soon as you create a strong, contagious atmosphere, and how it increases its influence upon you if you accept it and succumb to it willingly? (49)

Chekhov suggests that if the actor allows the sensations of the atmosphere to wash over the body, it will have a strong influence upon the other components of action: movements, feelings, and thoughts. The atmosphere is a shared communal feeling and does not exist solely because of the presence one individual’s energy or the presence of many individual’s energies. The atmosphere is the over-all feeling that arises from the entirety of the space objects as well as people. Although the atmosphere clearly has an affect upon the actor, according to Chekhov, the atmosphere should not be confused with the personal feelings of the character. He divides the two into two distinct categories when he writes, “Therefore, making a distinction between the two, we must call atmospheres *objective feelings* as opposed to individual *subjective feelings*”
(51). Chekhov begins chapter fourteen by suggesting that going out into the world and observing different atmospheres is a good way to further develop the use of atmospheres upon the stage. After carrying out several observations of atmospheres in the outside world, Chekhov again suggests that the actor shift the exercise to the imagination. He suggests using literature, history, and plays to stimulate the imagination of a scene. The actor should study every detail of this imaginary scene, from the feeling and attitudes of the individuals in the scene to knowing what clothing they are wearing. In essence, all the little bits and piece contribute to create the whole atmosphere and by studying these minute details and adding them to the atmosphere, it is reaffirmed for all that are involved. The actor should continue going through the scene within the mind, only this time shifting the whole of the scene into a different atmosphere. In doing this, the actor should observe how that change of atmosphere affects those imaginary characters. To further this exercise utilizing the imagination, Chekhov asks the actor to try more atmosphere work without the benefit of the set circumstances dictating the atmosphere. He writes:

You can do it by imagining the space, the air, around as filled with a certain atmosphere, just as it can be filled with light, fragrance, warmth, cold, dust or smoke. Imagine at first, any simple, quiet atmosphere like coziness, awe, solitude, foreboding, etc. Don’t ask yourself how it is possible to imagine the feeling of awe, or any other feeling floating in the air around you, before you actually try it, practice it. Two or three efforts will convince you that it is not only possible but extremely easy.

(56)

Like many other of Chekhov’s exercises, this one continues to work the components of thought, feeling, and sensation, utilizing the imagination to create the atmosphere in the space as well, he
suggests that the actor feel that imagined atmosphere. All of the components are brought together as Chekhov turns the direction of the exercise towards movement. He warns that the actor should not “perform” the atmosphere through the body; the atmosphere should be felt, not seen. In addition, he warns that the actor cannot force the body to feel the atmosphere. He writes, “You will feel it around you and within you as soon as you concentrate your attention on it properly. It will stir your feelings by itself, without any unnecessary and disturbing violence on your part. It will happen to you exactly the way it happens in life” (56). The continued development of these feelings and sensations associated with atmospheres further strengthens the actor’s ability to work within the overall mood of any production, it also continues to develop, even finely tune, the actor’s sensitivities to the many different levels of the performance and performance space.

Chekhov discusses the “individual feelings” of the actor towards the end of this chapter (47). He states that the actor cannot force the emotion of the character, nor can the actor pretend that they are feeling emotions. Emotions must come from true sensations. Through the use simple movements, he asks the actor to develop a simple gesture. After that simple gesture has been established, he suggests imbuing that gesture with a cautious quality. Once the actor proficiently accomplishes this movement imbued with caution, Chekhov claims the gesture becomes more than a physical movement. He states, “Your movement, made cautiously, is no longer a mere physical action; now it has acquired a certain psychological nuance. What is this nuance? It is a sensation of caution now fills and permeates your arm. It is a psychophysical sensation” (58). By combining the movement with feeling Chekhov states that the actor can take control of their individual feelings, it is the combination of the two components that leads to develop a “psychophysical sensation.” Continual practice combining movement with feeling stimulates and strengthens pathways that allow the actor to easily tap into the sensations from
which his/her emotions flow. In this regard there is no need to rely upon forced emotional acting or pretense of emotion because after so much practice the true feelings can be reached through thought alone. Once again, Chekhov is utilizing one or more of the components of action to strengthen the pathways of the other components, strengthening the overall bodily awareness.

This trend continues in chapter five, titled “The Psychological Gesture.” In this chapter Chekhov strengthens the component of feeling by utilizing the component of movement. He states:

You will discover that the kind of movement you make will give your will power a certain direction or inclination; that is, it will awaken and animate in you a definite desire, want or wish. So we may say that the strength of the movement stirs our will power in general; the kind of movement awakens in us a definite corresponding desire, and the quality of the same movement conjures up our feelings. (Chekhov 64)

Here, Chekhov displays a similar knowledge of the body, like the one described by Feldenkrais. Chekhov clearly understands the connection of movement to feeling and advocates that the actor use their movement to actuate powerful feelings in the body. As described by Feldenkrais, the intrinsic link between the components of action is essentially how Chekhov’s psychological gesture functions to create strong feelings from within the body. Chekhov suggests that applying psychological gesture to a character in the script is ultimately more helpful to the actor than using the analytical mind to dissect the script. According to Chekhov the psychological gesture should extend beyond the skin of physical body to be most effective. He writes:

Having achieved the physical limits of the PG [Psychological Gesture],

when your body is unable to extend it further, you must still continue to
try for a while (ten to fifteen seconds), going beyond the boundaries of your body by means of radiating its power and qualities in the direction indicated by the PG. This radiation will greatly strengthen the true psychological power of gesture, enabling it to produce greater influence upon your inner life. (72)

In Chekhov’s estimation, the power of the psychological gesture does not come from the movement itself, but its power resides in being able to extend that feeling into the form of energy. In effect, the power of the psychological gesture comes from being able to share the feeling developed through the movement with other actors and/or the audience by radiating that feeling from the body.

In Chekhov’s last two exercises, sixteen and seventeen, he uses the movement of different psychological gestures to further strengthen/develop the psychology and body, or as Feldenkrais would say, to further develop the components of action. In exercise sixteen he instructs the actor to use psychological gesture with a variety of tempos. He then asks the actor to use the feelings generated by that gesture and articulate that feeling with a sentence. In the use of this exercise, Chekhov desires to actuate sensitivities within the body, utilizing the feeling produced from the gesture to drive movements combined with vocalization also derived from those feelings. This exercise, he states, will “greatly increase the sense of harmony between your body, body psychology and speech. Developed to a high degree, you should be able to say, ‘I feel body and my speech as a direct continuation of my psychology. I feel them as visible and audible parts of my soul’” (73). Chekhov reveals what he believes the actor should strive to become; one fluid body attuned to the very atmosphere of the play, able to think and act freely upon the stage, wholly aware the body. This in turn, connects the actor to the space that exists
around that body. Regardless of whether it is an empty space or one that is filled with actors and audience, the artist should be able use the full potential of the body as well as fill the space around that body with energies and emotions inherent in the script.

Moshe Feldenkrais’s definition of awareness stipulates that all the components of action: movement, thought, feeling, and sensation are linked together and work in union with each other. As one or all of the components are strengthened, so each separate component develops, in that action, the whole body is strengthened. Through the continuous conscious observation of movement, an understanding develops about the body’s interconnected nature of movement to the feelings, sensations, and thoughts of the body. With continued practice the interconnectedness finally results in all the components coalescing, working together as one undivided body, fully aware of itself and the world that surrounds it. In his book To the Actor, Chekhov’s approach to training the actor is similar to the training and development of the body found in the Feldenkrais Method. Like Feldenkrais, Chekhov realizes that to observe one’s movements is necessary to develop the body to its fullest potential. Using Feldenkrais’s understanding of how awareness develops in the body to examine the exercises throughout To the Actor, it is clear that Chekhov developed an actor training system which constantly observes the body whole moving, which according to Feldenkrais is the first criteria for building bodily awareness.

Chekhov uses different terminology to describe the constituent components that allows for bodily awareness, mainly dividing them into two sections: the psychology and the body. This is very comparable to Feldenkrais’s understanding, only Feldenkrais breaks down what Chekhov calls the psychology into three distinct parts; sensations, feelings, and thoughts. Even though there appear to be discrepancies between the labels used, it is apparent that Chekhov’s beginning
exercises use movement, for the same purpose as Feldenkrais. They both use movement to strengthen the other components of action or the psychology. As suggested by both writers, movement is the only way to engage the inner self. From the beginning of *To the Actor*, Chekhov develops exercises that challenge the actor to utilize movement, thought, feeling, and sensations, sometimes beginning the work through movement, other times working through feelings or sensations to create movements or thoughts. These components are wholly utilized throughout all of the exercises, each exercise developing stronger and tighter bonds between the body and mind. According to the definitions of bodily awareness taken from Feldenkrais’s book, the theatre writings of Michael Chekhov in *To the Actor* reflect a strong agreement with Feldenkrais Method on how to approach building bodily awareness. In his exercises, Chekhov requires the actor to continually practice and rehearse using the different aspects of the psyche combined with movement. Chekhov acting method, if followed, will develop a greater awareness which allows the actor the opportunity, with increasing ease, to control the body. With the pinpoint focused control of the body gained through this method the actor is perpetually prepared and able to handle any obstacles that would hamper the body. Awareness training is important to the development of the actor’s greatest tool the body and should be included even at the most rudimentary levels of contemporary acting training.
TADASHI SUZUKI: “GRAMMAR OF THE FEET” AND BODILY AWARENESS

Tadashi Suzuki is a world renowned director who developed an actor training method, “Grammar of the Feet.” Through this method, actors develop high levels of strength and energy, but above all, the actor develops a bodily awareness necessary for the craft of acting. By examining the Grammar of the Feet by way of Feldenkrais, I hope to determine if the writings on Suzuki’s method incorporate into the training all the components of action that Feldenkrais states are necessary to build bodily awareness. I also expect that scrutinizing Suzuki’s writing, as well as writings about his method, will lead to a better understanding of the fundamental principles that operate within his system of actor training. As well, through this discussion, I hope to demonstrate that such body-centered methods should be a central component of contemporary actor training.

Tadashi Suzuki’s approach to training the actor, like that of Michael Chekhov, seeks the union of the body and the mind, so the actor is able to reach the highest potential possible in every aspect of their artistry upon the stage. Within the exercises of his system, “Grammar of the Feet,” Suzuki constantly builds a relationship between the actor and the ground. His familiarity with and training in the Japanese theatre forms of kabuki and noh highly influence his approach to training the actor. This can be seen in the construction of his exercises, where he uses those same discipline building principles found in the actor training of kabuki and noh. Suzuki’s writings in the 1986 book, The Way of Acting will be used as a beginning point from which to discuss his method. This book is a compilation of several short pieces in which he discusses his
philosophy on the theatre and the path of the actor. The first chapter introduces the method he calls “grammar of the feet.” In this section of the book he helps the reader understand his approach to theatre and why he believes the actor needs to re-establish a relationship of the feet with the ground. Unfortunately, this book does not provide a framework from which to examine Suzuki’s method through Feldenkrais’s understanding of awareness training. Therefore, the primary writings will be utilized to establish Suzuki’s views on actor training, and the examination of the exercises will come from a secondary source, The Art of Stillness: The Theatre Practice of Tadashi Suzuki by Paul Allain. Allain gives a detailed description of all the exercises used throughout Suzuki’s method.

In The Way of Acting, Suzuki describes the intent of his actor training method and its unique contribution to the craft of acting:

> The exercises are intended as a means to discover a self-consciousness of the interior of the body, and the actor’s success in doing them confirms his ability to make discoveries. The actor learns to become conscious of the many layers of sensitivity within his own body [. . .] The gesture of stamping on the ground [. . .] gives the actor a sense of the strength inherent in his own body. It is a gesture that can lead to the creation of a fictional space, perhaps even a ritual space, in which the actor’s body can achieve transformation from the personal to the universal. (12) Suzuki envisions an actor who is able to transcend the physical limits of the body. He wants an actor who is not only aware of the body, but also wholly aware of and contributing to the environment that extends around the body. Like Feldenkrais, Suzuki believes that the key to unlocking this awareness within the body is through movement, particularly stamping, although
in his method he covers many movements such as sitting, standing, walking, etc. In Allain’s discussion of the fundamental principles of Suzuki’s method, he writes:

   The teaching structure and the hierarchy in the training are both crystal clear. The teacher breaks exercises down into sections and demonstrates them. You then repeat these many times, with corrections given verbally and occasionally manually. [. . .] The energy and commitment must be sustained throughout the session. Sometimes you watch half of the group working, learning through observation of error and progress. There is little talk and comments are not encouraged. You learn with the body, not through questions, conducting an internal monologue rather than a dialogue with others or the teacher. In such silence there can be a progressive heightening of concentration as you move from one exercise to the next, and it is vital to try to sustain and build focus rather than let it dissipate between sequences. (115)

It is the repetition of these exercises that drills these movements into the memory and then into the physical body of the training actor. Through that repetition the actor is to be scrutinized and corrected by the teacher. The repetition also builds up the required stamina to maintain the commitment and energy levels while working. Allain writes:

   Repetition is central to Suzuki’s approach, as it is to many other disciplines where mastery rather than creativity or originality is prioritised. A routine is initially necessary to learn the form but it soon provides the means to examine yourself in relation to a fixed structure, allowing a deepening of the effect of the training on the performer.
Repetition also teaches precision and respect for the craft as you understand the complexity contained within small details. (Allain 117)

In comparing Suzuki’s method for building awareness with the awareness training as described by Feldenkrais, they both believe that the path to securing awareness relies on study of the body’s movement. Suzuki’s movement, combined with the repetition of the form, according to Allain, enforces continual observation of the body, an aspect that Feldenkrais sees as necessary for building awareness.

These beginning exercises are used by Suzuki to build up stamina and energy within the actor’s body by stamping the feet. According to Suzuki, the act of stamping the feet can energize and invigorate the relationship between the actor and the ground. He is quick to note that this idea is not a new one; the Japanese theatre has a long tradition of carefully focused use of the feet and legs. He states:

The act of stamping and pounding not only signifies pushing down the enemy, suppressing him or driving him away, but suggests as well the calling forth of energy of an object of worship, the taking of that energy into oneself, the bringing to ripeness of that life energy. Such gestures can drive away evil spirits and bring magical results, permitting the good spirits to come into the body of the performer with a strength greater than that of the bad. The many stamping gestures in Kabuki and nō doubtless derive from these kinds of physical sensations. (14)

Suzuki explains the energetic power that can result from the stamping the ground. Although Suzuki recognizes the power that stamping holds in theatre, he writes that theatre requires more than rhythmical dancing to convey its message. He writes:
Expression in the theatre does not merely consist of dance like motions of the body. What makes theatre theatrical involves all the variations of the body when speaking. I have attempted to examine closely all the postures used in a person’s daily life, particularly when speaking [...] What, then, are the basic postures involved in the conduct of our daily lives? To simplify the description, the body positions can be divided into two categories, those in which the body is still and those in which the body is moving. (14)

Suzuki asks the actor to observe every movement as well as the stillness in between those movements. He states that stillness can be further divided into three categories; standing, sitting in a chair, and sitting on the floor. His analysis continues as he categorizes the different types of movement. He writes:

The three basic forms of movement are those performed while walking, standing, and sitting. But it must be remembered that human actions, whether they involve movement or not, flow in a continuum. For example, a person sitting with his feet under his legs may shift onto one knee, then stand on the soles of his feet, rise to his toes to take the book off of a shelf, then sit down to read. (20)

Like Feldenkrais, Suzuki realizes that the body is in constant motion and that bodily awareness stems from constant observation of the movements. Suzuki’s method was developed to unify the actor’s whole body; although he does not label different aspects of the body, as does Feldnekrais’s method with the components of action. Suzuki does not use those exact words to
describe his understanding of how the components of action work to build bodily awareness. He writes:

Considering various types of body placement from another perspective, changes in posture and movement often seem closely related to differences in the positions of the feet. It is for this reason that this grammar, this way of using the feet, has been developed around the differences in sensations felt in the body as it connects with the ground. The goal is to ensure and enrich the histrionic unification of the whole bodily expression along with the speech; both of these elements are constructed on the basis of the feet. (20)

The different movements and positions of the feet allow the actor to feel the different sensations as the body make a connection with the ground. From the relationship established through stamping the ground, the over-all point of Suzuki’s exercise is to strengthen expression of the body as well as speech. Suzuki writes about the interconnected nature of total “bodily expression” and “speech” stating that they are wholly connected to the actor’s relationship of the feet with the ground. Expression of the body seems to mean for Suzuki, focused control over all the movements of the body, and his use of the word speech suggests, at least on some level, a focused connection to thoughts and feelings because speech is a socially shared verbalization, representative of our thoughts. The interplay of the components of action as introduced by Feldenkrais can be observed in Suzuki’s discussion of the body’s relationship to the ground. With observation of movement and expression of thought the actor is able to discover the different sensations and feelings that result from the various ways of moving and contacting the ground. Stated in this way, Suzuki’s method is a study of the same components of action
described by Feldenkrais. Utilizing one or more of the components of action, the other
underdeveloped components of actions are made stronger. The theory behind “Grammar of the
Feet” supports an understanding similar to the awareness development displayed by both
Feldenkrais and Chekhov. By examining Suzuki’s basic exercises, as described by Paul Allain,
with Feldenkrais’s understanding of how to build bodily awareness, I should be able to be
determined whether Suzuki considers in his theatre writings the four components of action as
fundamental principles for building awareness.

Allain prefaces his description of Suzuki’s method by saying that his writings represent
the very basics of Suzuki’s method. The first exercise, “Throwing Feet” or “Basic Number One,”
begins with very specific movements incorporated with proper deep breathing (102). The
instructions about the movements are so exacting that this exercise actively engages the actor by
forcing the body to coordinate the movements using focused thought. This exercise begins by
utilizing two of Feldenkrais’s components of action: movement and thought. Allain’s
description begins as follows:

You start with your legs and heels pressed together, pushing against each
other to create light tension in the legs, and an energised lower half of
the body, and the feet pointed at a forty-five degree angles to the left and
right. [ . . .] You must sense the contact with the floor through this
aligned stance and find a feeling of stability [ . . .] With this position
established, you raise your leg slightly forward along the diagonal and
then stamp directly to the right. Rather than leading from the foot, you
should feel the centre shifting rapidly to the right [ . . .] The stamp is with
the whole of the foot and should be firm and energised, threatening to destabilise and challenge the centred and grounded body. (102)

This description not only demonstrates the level of bodily observation required in the execution of this exercise, but as well Allain describes the over-all intent behind the practice of the exercise. The underlying purpose of exercise one is to “challenge the centered and grounded body.”

“Basic Exercise Two” or “Stamp and Change” is very similar to the “Basic Exercise One,” with subtle changes in the foot work and arm position which again challenge the actor to be attentive to the movements and body balance. Rather than raising and throwing the foot to either the left or right side, the moving leg is lifted into the air, then it is stamped down on the floor directly under the hip, and then it is slid forward until the opposing leg that carried the weight of the body is straightened behind the body. These movements build upon what has already been practiced in exercise one. They are to be done swiftly with great attention paid to the maintenance of balance as well as the rhythm of the body while moving. Rhythm is an important aspect of Suzuki’s method. He suggests playing music that has a well-defined beat, so the actor can practice the movements with the structure provided by the beat. Allain writes, “The sequence can also be practised to music as you proceed in a slow march across the stage in evenly space pairs, emphasising the stop at the end of the movement. It is vital to avoid flow and not follow the music passively but attempt to keep on top of the rhythm, almost attacking it” (104). Using the rhythm in the exercises demonstrates to the actor that there is a need to become aware of the outside influences and effects upon the body. The exercise forces the actor to take control of the body and the music at the same time, focus the mind beyond the body in the efforts to maintain movement that are connected to the rhythm of the music. By introducing rhythm into
this exercise Suzuki begins to utilize the sensations of the body according to Feldenkrais. In his definition of a sensation, Feldenkrais includes rhythm. Whether it is a slow tempo that gives a sensation of lethargy or a fast tempo that gives a sensation excitement, we as human beings have a connection to music. Suzuki’s utilization of music creates and continually strengthens a connection to the sensations of the body. This connection of music and movement directly incorporates at least one aspect of the sensations of the body as well as the component of thought, which is developed through constant maintenance of the body during the exercises.

In Allain’s discussion of exercise three, he observes the differences between the first two exercises. He writes, “This exercise extends the same technical elements [as exercise one and two] by demanding greater energy, more complex arm movements and the use of diagonals” (107). Like Chekhov and Feldenkrais, Suzuki gradually introduces subtle changes to the beginning forms, this allows the actor to slowly, but surely, build the exercises without being overwhelmed by learning several different movements all at once. Allain further examines the third exercise: “The exercise demands a constant level of the torso as well as stability, which is severely challenged by the rapid arm movement. The combination of the arms and the stamping tests coordination and detail, with the simultaneous focus on the upper and lower body as well as the precise positioning of the fingers” (106). In the description of this exercise, meticulous observation of the body becomes a constantly practiced theme throughout Suzuki’s method. The balance of the actor’s body is further challenged when Suzuki adds movements of the arms into this exercise. Utilizing the upper body this exercise begins to shift the actor’s focus from the feet and ground to the development of coordination in the whole body. Viewing this passage using the different components of action reveals that movement, thoughts, and sensations are all developed within this exercise.
In the fourth basic exercise, Suzuki incorporates a pivot movement in the walk as well as a continuation of the arm movements. The central difficulty of this exercise is that the pivots are accomplished at a high speed. Success stems from the actor’s ability to immediately stop the body without loss of balance. Allain states that “turning both ways” in this exercise “requires kinesthetic coordination, and it can take time for the pattern to become inscribed to the body” (107). Kinesthetic coordination simply explained is an over-all coordination of movement. This two way pivot in exercise four is another way that Suzuki continues to build upon the former exercises yet, offer new challenges to the body.

The descriptions of these four exercises demonstrate that Suzuki expects very detailed and specific movements from the actor. Because he requires such a high level of specificity for each of movement exercises, as the actor trains the body develops a high level of concentration in which s/he becomes a conscious observer of the body. Throughout these primary exercises, Suzuki heavily utilizes two of Feldenkrais’s four components of action: movement and thought. Movement and thought are the two components that Feldenkrais suggests starting with to actively become aware of the body. Because these movements are the essence of “Grammar of the Feet,” Allain suggests that the basic four exercises should be accomplished one after the other and several times during a session. In other words, these core exercises are elements that are stringently and repeatedly practiced throughout the whole of Suzuki’s process. These basic exercises constitute the foundation from which “Grammar of the Feet” engages the actor’s body, opening up the mind for sensations, feelings, and all manner of thought. According to Ian Carruthers, co-author of The Theatre of Suzuki Tadashi, the purpose of these first exercises is to ensure the actor’s ability to exact control over of the body. He writes:
The side stamp sends an emphatic shockwave back up the body which needs to be stopped in the center so that no jarring is evident in the upper body. It is not so much a stamp as a ‘throwing out of the leg’ (ashi o hour) to establish a new center of gravity to the side. The stamp is only the effect of catching the body at the falling point. Speed, precision, and energy are important in (1) and (2) while extreme (and extremely painful) restraint is necessary in the slow motion movements of (3) and (4). (83)

After the examination of the four initial exercises, Suzuki is constantly utilizing two of the components of action as described by Feldenkrais. After these exercises are practiced and well known, the use of the components movement and thought can potentially stimulate the utilization of sensations and feelings, given the interconnected nature of the components. Neither Suzuki nor Allain suggest that these exercises will stimulate feelings and/or sensations, other than through the development of rhythm, which Feldenkrais classifies as an aspect of sensations. However, in a comment made by Carruthers’s and Takahashi’s discussion of Suzuki’s method, given the nature of the training, there are sensations of pain involved in the execution of these exercises and, according to Feldenkrais, pain is another aspect that is included in the definition of sensations in the body.

In the next section of Allain’s book, he describes a number of different stylized walks that continue to build upon the framework of the earlier exercises. The walks discussed within this section are to be done with music, just as in the earlier exercises. In Allain’s description of the walks, they are classified as one unit, much like the four basic exercises in Suzuki’s method work as a unit. He states, “As the Basic exercises group into one unit, so the walks combine into
a single flowing sequence. After learning them one at a time, you practise these together to music as you move diagonally across the floor” (107). The ten walks discussed by Allain are derived from the stances and movements of the basic exercises. Each quick-paced walk is Suzuki’s attempt to ever-increase the challenges to the body, challenges that are continually overcome through practice. These walks further train the actor in Feldenkrais’s components of action, like the basic exercises, through movement, thought and different aspects of bodily sensations. However, in the elaborations of the walks, Suzuki allows the movement to alter. These alterations include: “carrying objects; choosing and changing arm positions (for example, on tiptoes the arms might constantly alter position); walking backwards; leading off from the left rather than the right” (Allain 107). Suzuki allows the actor more freedom to explore the movement with the inclusion of these variations in the walking exercises. Moreover, he allows the actor to begin utilizing movements that are encountered in daily life by allowing some amount of freedom in the walks. By giving the actor the possibility of exploring different walks, Suzuki is asking the actor to use thoughts, feelings, and sensations to guide the body through the exercise. The thoughts, feelings, and sensations that make up the inner personality (hence, the psychology) wholly affect the type of walk expressed by the actor and so too the type of walk wholly affects the psychology as the exercise is undertaken. In this exercise, by giving the actor the opportunity to utilize more of their own psychology, Suzuki effectively uses all of the components of action discussed by Feldenkrais. The early exercises of Suzuki’s method display a pattern of using movement, highly focused thought, and sensations. However, up to this point there has not been a direct discussion of Feldenkrais’s component: feeling.

The reason that Suzuki does not directly utilize the component of feeling is because feelings often inhibit the mind, preventing clear and focused thought. Although there is no
mention in the written material on his method about why the development of feelings are not fully exercised, a plausible explanation maybe found in Feldenkrais’s book. He writes, “We have seen that the structures used for thinking are loosely linked with those housing feelings. Clear thought is born only in the absence of strong feelings that distort objectivity. Thus a necessary condition for the development of effective thinking is continuous withdrawal from feelings and [. . . ] sensations” (52). At this stage of the training, Suzuki may not actively be pursuing emotions or feelings in the actor. Suzuki may purposefully be avoiding the use of feelings in his method in an effort to help maintain the actor’s focus and to keep the observations of the body as objective as possible. Further examination of Suzuki’s method should determine whether the later exercises incorporate in a more direct way Feldenkrais’s component of feeling.

The last movement exercises discussed by Allain are: “Slow ten tekka ten,” “Stamping Shakuhachi,” and “Sitting and Standing Statues” (110). The “Slow ten tekka ten” are the same as the ten walks previously discussed, only in this exercise the walks are completed at a drastically reduced speed. The slow walks challenge the acting student’s stamina and coordination. Due to the pace of the exercise, the actor is allowed more time for an in-depth scrutiny of the body’s movement. In Allain’s description of the slow walks, he describes Suzuki’s method as utilizing those same components of action: movement, thought, and sensations without particular attention to the component: feeling.

“Stamping Shakuhachi” also challenges the physical and mental stamina of training actors by requiring them to stamp vigorously to music for three minutes and then collapse to the floor (111). Rising from the floor, the actors finish this exercise by walking for three minutes with the upper body immobilized, in what is called the “Standing Statue.” The “Standing
Statue” and “Sitting Statues” exercises build directly from all the previous exercises (111).

According to Allain:

From a standing-point, you move repeatedly to “freestyle” frozen poses interspersed with low crouches [. . .] These poses are held on tiptoes and may be oriented ahead, to the left or right, and low or high. It is important that the whole body faces one direction or stops at one level; the arms or head should not move as separate units [. . .] This is one of the few exercises in the method where the work of the imagination is evident and improvisation is necessary. It thus provides openings into compositional and image-based theater-making. (112)

By giving the actor the ability to make choices in these exercises, the imagination is more engaged than in previous exercises. Through the use of improvisation in this statue exercise Suzuki further demonstrates an understanding similar to that of Feldenkrais, in which, all the components of action: movement, thought, sensation, and feeling, need to be practiced for the actor to become aware of the body. “Sitting Statues” offers the same type of muscle isolation and control building exercises as evident in “Standing Statue.” The only difference exists in the relationship of the actor’s body to the ground.

As stated by Allain above, there are few exercises that encourage the actor to seek and understand the feelings of the body. Most of the exercises require stringent focus of the thought upon the movements of the body as well as involve the sensations of the body, but do not address feelings. If Suzuki’s Method was based upon solely upon these movement exercises, then according to Feldenkrais, his method would lack one of the fundamental principles necessary to
develop bodily awareness. However, other practices in Suzuki’s Method combined with these movement exercises integrate more frequently Feldenkrais’s components: feeling and thought.

The voice training in these exercises helps the actor approach a greater utilization of the components of feeling and thought. The voice is continually incorporated into the movement exercises throughout. As well as offering further challenges for actor’s body, the use of words and vocalization actively engage more fully, aspects of the psychology. Suzuki suggests that the actor use the voice when it is most inconvenient for the body. This builds stamina and energy for the use of the voice regardless of the hampering effects of an awkwardly positioned body.

According to Allian:

The voice is thus primarily considered in terms of energy. There is no technical exploration of the voice as an organ of speech or the body as a site of resonators [. . .] Rather than using the voice in a state of relaxation that is familiar to western approaches, it is drawn out in position of tension. The voice is added as you fight for balance when one leg is raised or when the stomach muscles are struggling to hold the upper torso off the floor. (113)

A continual practice of the vocal training, combined with the intensive movement training, allows Suzuki-trained actors to fuse the spoken word with movement to create fluid and seemly effortless utilization of both. With the addition of voice work to the movement exercises, this method comes closer to tapping more directly into thought and feelings than with the movement exercises alone. If these voice and movement exercises are practiced diligently then actor gains the ability to switch from one movement to the next without it affecting the use of the voice in the slightest.
In Suzuki’s voice and speech work, he employs texts to be memorized and spoken during the movement exercises. He specifically chooses a number of different texts that each have their own unique emotional qualities. Allain states:

Various classical texts are used [. . .] usually derived from Suzuki’s performance repertoire. They include Macbeth’s –‘Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow’ – and Menelaus from the Trojan Women [. . .] Suzuki also uses popular songs, so that you have the further challenge of singing and reciting simultaneously. (113)

Linked to all of these texts there is inherent emotional meaning which is associated with the context of the speech and even the words themselves. The meaning of the speech may change after continual scrutiny of the text, but, because of the role of language in human society, there will always be some kind of emotion associated with the words and phrases we use. For Suzuki language does not simply come from the voice, but, our words are wholly connected to the use of our bodies. He writes, “Gesture is tied intimately to the words being spoken; indeed, words represent human gesture. There can be no words spoken that are not intimately connected to bodily sensations and rhythms” (5). Through the recitation of these texts, Suzuki asks the actor to explore the use of movement, tempo, and breath control. Combining and practicing with this awareness the actor is forced to understanding the relationship between the words we use and the gestures of the body. All of Feldenkrais’s components of action become more fully utilized when both the gesture and words of the speech stir up the sensations and feelings of the body.

Upon further inspection of Suzuki’s work, one aspect that wholly incorporates bodily awareness is the group dynamic, in which all of these exercises are completed. By doing these exercises with the intent of synchronizing movements with all the other members of a group, the
training actor is constantly forced to examine the body’s actions in relation to the groups. This heightened focus on the outer world combined with the focus on the inner body, requires the actor to become aware of the whole through understanding and continually exercising both the inner and outer worlds of the actor’s body. This idea of inner and outer focus is equivalent to the body/mind divide discussed earlier. Michael Chekhov suggests that the inner body is the psychology. Likewise, Feldenkrais suggests that the inner body consists of thoughts, sensations, and feelings. Both writers agree that the outer body exists in the observation movement through the atmosphere. Allain discusses the demands of Suzuki’s Method on both the inner and outer worlds of the actor. He writes:

> Body awareness and inner concentration must be total and detailed, and projected both inward and outwards. Once contact with the floor is felt through the stamping (tingling and slight pain grow in the feet) and is established at maximum velocity, you add and have to remember the arms. As soon as the shoulders relax you lose the quality of the stamping. You initially chase the centre of attention around the body before learning to focus on the whole as one unit, tweaking specific parts rather than shifting attention to one area. This demands full concentration on the total task. (119)

Over time, the continual and intensive observation of the different parts of the body, while working through Suzuki’s exercises, combined with constant observation and working as part of a group, actuates within the actor a deeper bodily awareness. The outer and inner focus of Suzuki’s training constantly pushes the actor to scrutinize everything inside the body in relation to everything outside the body. Once the actor has achieved this balance between the inner and
the outer, s/he can begin to fully utilize the energies of the body. Suzuki discusses the importance of understanding and utilizing the energy of the body in an interview with Toni Sant. Suzuki writes, “I believe that fundamentally the way in which we use the animal energy in our bodies to communicate with each other and the richness of this form of communication are the foundation of culture and cultural practices. The ways in which we use this animal energy in our daily lives, use it efficiently, and enjoy it together as a group, is how we create a society and harmony, how we come together” (Sant 152). Suzuki believes that the fullest communication of one body to another does not exist solely in the realm of words, but the whole body is engaged in communication. It is a combination of the words, gestures, and animal energies that effectively communicate ideas from one individual to another.

In Suzuki’s Method, as described by these various writers, after the full implementation of the training, the mind/body divide dissipates, giving the actor total awareness and control of the body. According to Feldenkrais, building awareness in the body stems from observing the movements of the body. Suzuki’s method involves a rigorous training program which asks the actor for exacting scrutinized movement of the body while working through the exercises. When examining the writings on Suzuki’s method for aspects that build awareness in the body through the lens of Feldenkrais’s terminology of implementing bodily awareness, Suzuki’s method utilizes, in one regard or another, all the components of action throughout the training.

Movement and thought are fully utilized in his method and serve as the framework through which Suzuki engages the psychology of the actor. By utilizing movement and thought, the actor is able to begin to build bodily awareness without direct stimulation of the other components. Suzuki’s method asks the actor to observe movement, constantly scrutinize, and adjust the body so that it functions properly throughout the exercise. Because these exercises are
constantly practiced, the two components movement and thought are unendingly and progressively utilized. Essentially, these two components are heavily utilized in all of the exercises.

With the addition of music, the element of sensation is introduced into the exercises and thus into the actor’s consciousness. Music is utilized in many of the exercises because rhythm is an integral aspect of Suzuki’s training exercises. Music produces sensation in the body because of the effect rhythm has on the human body. Rhythm affects the body as a regular beat of the music is analogous to the constant regular beating of the heart. In some way, because rhythm sometimes mirrors the beating heart, it is familiar to the psyche. As Feldenkrais states, the sensations of the body include the five senses, pain, “orientation of space, the passage of time, and rhythm” (31). In Suzuki’s method the passage of time is a consideration because he uses different tempos throughout the exercises. The other three aspects of sensation -- pain, orientation in space, and rhythm -- are also prevalent throughout. At least two quotes within this thesis discuss the possible pain involved in the completion these exercises. Because these exercises are so rigorous and utilize the body in ways to which many actors are not accustomed, it is no surprise that muscles would become very sore in the initial stages of the method. In addition, the act of stomping is often fast and leads to full-strength contact with the ground, which can be very painful. Furthermore, moving with a partner and/or moving as a whole group is a factor in all, if not most, of the exercises designed by Suzuki. Moving in a group asks the training actor constantly to consider the body’s orientation in space in relation to the other group members.

From the pain, rhythm and orientation in space evident within his exercises, Suzuki’s method does develop the sensations within the body on many levels. In making use of three of
the components of action, according to Feldenkrais, the fourth component is habitually strengthened and made more readily accessible to the individual. Suzuki’s method does directly approach the development of the component of action that entails the feelings of the body. By requiring the actor to memorize and present written material in the exercises, Suzuki’s method contains some utilization of feelings. Due to the emotional connection that human beings have to language, any and all of Suzuki’s exercises that involve words utilize the components of both thought and feelings. In his method, clearly there is some use of the feelings within the body, however, Suzuki’s attitude about training actors with regards to emotion of the character are summed up in an interview conducted by Stephanie Coen, who interviewed four individuals that went through the training program at SITI in Saratoga, New York. One of the actor’s recalls:

I remember Mr. Suzuki saying, when asked about the character’s emotional inner life: “Well, you have emotions don’t you?” Yes, I’m alive, I have emotions. “Well, that’s great. So we don’t have to work on those. Let’s work on the thing that we’re interested in, which is the theatre, the metaphor of the theatre.” So I don’t think it’s setting that psychological role aside, but just acknowledging that it exists and going on from there. (Coen 34)

Thus, Suzuki is not concerned with the direct development of the feelings. Instead, he has come to believe that the development and understanding of feelings is a natural process that need not be taught. However, in examining Suzuki’s Method with Feldenkrias’s comprehension of developing bodily awareness, it is not necessary for Suzuki to purposefully train the actor in the use of emotion. If movements, thoughts, feelings, and sensations are interconnected as Feldenkrais suggests, then undoubtedly, through the exercising of the three components of
action: movement, thought, and sensation, the forth component is invariably exercised. Whether, Suzuki purposeful excludes training the feelings of the actor in his method or not, is of no consequence, because a variety of feelings will inherently develop through practicing his method.

From this examination of Suzuki method, it is apparent that he strives for the same bodily awareness as outlined by Feldenkrais, or as practiced by Michael Chekhov in his book *To the Actor*. Suzuki’s method instills within the actor a highly developed sense of the body. By exercising the movements of the body, he trains the actor to be aware of the body as an undivided entity, in which, there is no distinction between the psychology and body. Awareness training is very important to the craft of acting. Through this method, the actor maybe able to reach a higher potential of the human body and mind, allowing for complete submission of the acting body to the actor’s whim.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

For thousands of years religions and philosophies have been trying to discover a way to awaken the body. Many have sought to find a harmonic flow of the body as it exists in nature, and to achieve a feeling of direct connection of the body to the universe. They have sought a primal state, where the body and mind existed as one in a perpetual state of readiness, aware of everything surrounding it. In this primal state of awareness, all the muscles of the body are poised and ready. Likewise, for thousands of years, in different parts of the world, philosophers, practitioners, and writers have come to develop such awareness of the self through intensive training and introspection. Trying to unfold the secrets of the human body is a quest as old as human existence. Eastern philosophies and teachings such as Buddhism, Hindu and Shinto all seek a greater bodily awareness in some measure or another. Tai Chi, yoga, martial arts, and many other physical systems developed out of these Eastern philosophies as efforts to develop bodily awareness through movement.

In his book *Awareness through Movement* Moshe Feldenkrais demonstrates, simple exercises that will improve health, posture, imagination, and personal awareness. As described by Feldenkrais, bodily awareness is possible in our species because of the interrelation of the different systems of the human mind. In his breakdown of human physiology, the brain is divided into regions or systems. The two older regions of the brain are present in many animals across the planet. According to Feldenkrais, the third region of the brain later developed out of the two older regions and is only evident in human beings. It is the relationship between the older
regions of the brain and the third system that makes awareness possible. Although the third region is directly connected to the two older regions, the third region is also directly tied to and can exercise direct motor control over the body. Through this development, the nerve pathways of the mind allow for a delay between thought and the execution of an action. Feldenkrais states that this delay is what allows us to ‘think first’ and ‘act later.’ This ability, he says, is “the basis of [human] imagination and intellectual judgment” (45). Imagination and intellectual judgment allow human beings to observe themselves and the world around them. Feldenkrais proposes that it is possible to develop bodily awareness through movement, and claims that this can lead to “better posture, vision, imagination, and personal awareness” (title page). He further states that the waking hours of our existence can be divided into four components of action: movement, thought, feelings, and sensations. To develop awareness in the body, Feldenkrais suggests that constant observation of the movements of the body helps to further stimulate the pathways in the mind and develop the less evident components of action: thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Due to the interconnected nature of the nerve pathways in the human mind, each component continually helps to strengthen other components further developing the whole body.

The Feldenkrais Method is world renowned. The Method was developed because Feldenkrais refused to have surgery to repair a reoccurring knee problem, as an alternative, he utilized his knowledge of jiujitsu and human physiology to develop a self-rehabilitating program. He was able to rehabilitate his knee and soon after he began teaching the method. At present this method has developed into a world-wide community of teachers and practitioners. Using Feldenkrais’s physiological knowledge of building awareness in the body as a lens, I examined Michael Chekhov’s To the Actor and Tadashi Suzuki’s method “Grammar of the Feet.” The purpose of this examination was to determine if these actor training methods included
training in bodily awareness as outlined by Feldenkrais. In other words, do the methods of Chekhov and Suzuki actively develop the components of action as ascribed by Feldenkrais: movement, thought, feelings, and sensations? Finally, if these methods do train the actor in a manner similar to that suggested by Feldenkrais, are there any core similarities between these methods that might point up the tools necessary to point the actor down the path of training bodily awareness?

The examination of Chekhov’s *To the Actor* using Feldenkrais’s method revealed many similarities between the two methods. Primarily, Chekhov begins his actor-training exercises through utilization of imagination and inspection of movement. As stated by Feldenkrais, observation of movement is the only way possible way to explore the other three components of action: sensations, thoughts and feelings. Since these components operate within the body, they cannot be actively studied, however, movement of the body is overt and observable. Through the utilization of movement Chekhov also begins to explore thought. He suggests that the actor should move around the space and, while moving, he asks the actor to imagine different scenarios (e.g. Imagine you are very large or small). In this exercise, while observing the movements of the body and actively thinking of imaginary circumstances the actor is able to explore the mind. In Feldenkrais’s terminology, the exercise utilizes the component of thought combined with the component of movement. Within his first few exercises, Chekhov is already strengthening both the movement and thought. Chekhov states that actively observing movement while thinking will stimulate the development of sensations in the body. Like Feldenkrais, he understands the interconnected nature of the different aspects of the psychology to the body.
To integrate the body and mind Chekhov suggests four kinds of movement that should be instilled within the actor’s body by the seventh exercise. Molding, floating, flying and radiating are all significant aspects of this integration. According to Chekhov, each of these practiced movements has a particular effect on the body. For instance, floating should be accompanied by feelings and sensations that are light and airy. The sensation of airiness might stimulate feeling happiness or freedom. In turn, those feelings and sensations are evident in the body when viewing the actor while doing this exercise. By suggesting that the actor focus on these feelings and sensations, Chekhov further strengthens those links in the mind between Feldenkrais’s components of action. Eventually, Chekhov wants the actor to develop the ability to control and utilize as independently as possible the feelings and sensations of the body, through thought alone, without movement. As the Chekhov method continues to progressively combine and work all the components of action, he many times uses the same terms as Feldenkrais to describe the benefits of these exercises. In his exercises focused on ease, beauty, form, and entirety, Chekhov uses the imagination again combined with movement to stimulate the feelings and sensations of the actor. In the exercise devoted to ease, he states that the best way to develop a sense of ease upon the stage is to continue to practice the flying and radiating exercises. Each of the components is relied upon in the observation of beauty: movement, feelings, thoughts, and sensations of the body are all involved in the process of observation.

To further develop form, Chekhov suggests revisiting the four kinds of movement learned earlier in his process. Therefore, throughout the rest of his book, Chekhov continues to work and rework the actor’s body by using variations of the early exercises, which in essence, utilizes all of Feldenkrais’s components of actions. This strengthens the body/mind together as one, stimulating bodily awareness. In these latter exercises, to ensure that each of the
components is properly stimulated, Chekhov switches how the exercises begin. Instead of using movement to stimulate thoughts, feelings, and sensations, Chekhov suggests that the actor begin some of the exercises using the imagination to first stimulate feelings and sensations and later incorporate movement. It is the reversal of Chekhov’s initial process that helps to continually develop all the components, allowing the actor to use the components independently or all together. Essentially, he wants the actor to fully know and be able to use the different attributes of the mind.

After evaluating Chekhov’s exercises in *To the Actor* through the concept of awareness as discussed by Feldenkrais, it is evident that Chekhov’s method of actor training does fully and thoroughly stimulate all of Feldenkrais’s components of action. Given the level of repetition Chekhov suggests in all of the exercises, the actor will develop through continued practice, a sense of the whole body with no distinction between the mind and body.

Using Feldenkrais’s physiological understanding of building awareness in the body as a lens, I also examined Tadashi Suzuki’s actor training method “Grammar of the Feet,” as described in Suzuki’s work and by Paul Allain in *The Art of Stillness*. Like Chekhov, Suzuki seeks the union of the body and the mind, so that the actor is able to reach the potential of the body in every aspect of their artistry upon the stage. Through his own theatre writings and several sources that discuss his method, there is evidence that Suzuki’s goal is to train the body to function effortlessly and fluidly. He begins his method with the basic four exercises. Like Feldenkrais, Suzuki believes that the key to unlocking bodily awareness is through movement, particularly stamping of the feet. By stamping the feet on the ground Suzuki wants the actor to build a relationship between the body and the ground. The movements in these initial exercises start from very specific positions and lead into specific movements. The four beginning exercises
are the core of his method and are utilized throughout the training. Exercise one involves learning the basic form and practicing it. Learning the specific movements in this first exercise the actor incorporates three of Feldenkrais’s components of action: movement, thought, and sensation. Movement is most obviously utilized when the exercises suggest that the actors stamp across the room diagonally. Through the observation of the strenuous bodily positions, he guides the actor to focus the mind, further incorporating into the exercise Feldenkrais’s component of thought. The third component utilized in this exercise is sensation. Given the extreme positions that Suzuki demands of the actor, an actor not accustomed to holding or moving the body in such a way may experience pain in the legs and feet. According to Feldenkrais because pain is experienced as a sensation, three of his components of actions are strengthened through this exercise.

The second exercise is much like the first. Although the positions and movements are slightly different, it also involves stamping across the room. The components of thought and movement are still utilized and with the addition of music to the exercises, Suzuki integrates Feldenkrais’s component of sensation to an even greater degree. According to Feldenkrais, the rhythm that is experienced when listening to music stimulates sensations in the body. In the third exercise, while stamping walks are done across the floor, swift arm movements further challenge the actor’s balance. The forth exercise involves the same rigorous attention to movement. Suzuki suggests that the actor establish a quick walk in which they pivot and stamp alternating from the left to the right foot. Once the actor is comfortable with this walk, very brisk arm movements are added. The purpose of this exercise is to develop the ability to come to a complete stop at the end of the movement without the loss of balance or the prescribed body position. In Suzuki’s method there is continued and constant development of Feldenkrais’s components of action: movement,
thought, and sensation throughout all of these principal exercises. Since these exercises are used throughout Suzuki’s method, the three components are directly being strengthened, guiding the actor towards combining the mind and body as one.

In Allain’s recounting of ten basic ways of walking, Suzuki asks the actor to practice several different ways of navigating across the floor. These initial ten walks are further supplemented by accomplishing the same walks only at a slower pace. Throughout the ten walks, ten slow walks, sitting statue, and standing statue, as well as the voice work, Suzuki develops and exercises those three initial components with little or no direct attention given to the component of feeling. Suzuki goes so far as to state that although feelings are necessary for the craft of acting his method does not need to train feelings within the actor because we all have them and know how to use them. However, even without the direct stimulation of feeling within Suzuki’s exercises, the interconnected nature of the components of action, according to Feldenkrais, allows that if the other three components are exercised then invariably the fourth component is also developed and strengthened. Beyond this indirect method of developing feelings, Suzuki does incorporate the components of sensations and feeling in a more direct way. This is accomplished through the group dynamics of Suzuki’s exercises. Throughout the exercises the training actors work within a group and move as a group. Through the synchronicity of these group movements, the actor develops sensitivity to the feelings and sensations of the group. It is through these sensitivities that the actor must focus his thoughts outside the body. Suzuki’s method uses the observation of repetitive movements purposefully to focus the actor’s thought inward on the body and in a similar way the group work focuses the actor’s attention outward. Because these aspects of his method are utilized through the whole of his training, the inner world of the body and the outer world of the body eventually begin to
function as one with no divide between them. In other words, the psychology and the body begin to work as one. In this regard, if Allain’s description is accurate, Suzuki’s method does directly utilize all of the components of action and should lead to the development of the whole body awareness as described by Feldenkrais.

Both of these actor training methods do contain features that assist in the development of bodily awareness as described by Feldenkrais. The importance of developing bodily awareness for the actor is immeasurable. As illustrated by my early performance experiences, actors with an untrained body may find that they nervously pace back and forth before the audience or find that they are barely able to speak their lines because of tension and strain on the vocal cords. In contrast, an actor who constantly observes the movements of the body slowly develops the ability to control the body, allowing the body to breathe freely and move unrestrained by tension as Feldenkrais suggests. After taking some acting classes that focused on Chekhov’s method in my sophomore year at the University of Buffalo, I began to practice his exercises on my own. In my senior year I was cast as the Ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Before each performance I worked through a routine of movements that involved stretching, breathing, and an imaginative walk through of the scene with the lines. This focused my mind and prepared me for the arduous task associated with this particular part. On the day of the third performance, I practiced my routine as usual; when I approached the stage I felt calm and collected. As I began to deliver my lines, I could feel the words flowing through me as if they were my own and I could feel the energy emanating from my body connecting to the actor playing Hamlet. We remained wholly connected through the rest of the scene. At times, all I could feel was the connection to the other actor and the words flowed out of my mouth without thought or hesitation. After exiting the stage I was enthralled; I had never experienced such a deep connection to my work. My
impression of the scene was corroborated after the show when the actor playing Hamlet approached me and exclaimed that she had been able to feel the energy radiating from my body. Beyond our shared experience during the scene, several of the cast members as well as several audience members also mentioned how connected I appeared to be during the performance. Thinking of how I felt that day, I am reminded of Chekhov’s discussion of atmosphere. He writes, “with the atmosphere reigning on stage, your feelings (and not only your intellect) will be stirred and awakened. You will feel the content and very essence of the scene. Your understanding will be broadened by these feelings. The content of the scene will become richer and more significant to your perception” (To the Actor 48). This quote above is an excellent description of everything I experienced on the stage that day. The aspect of this performance that made it memorable for me was that my whole body was working as one, I was not thinking in the back of my mind about the lines or any other thought. The only thoughts on my mind were the connection I felt to the other actor and the over-all feeling of the scene. It was this experience that caused me to further investigate the possibilities and potential of the human body. Because of the high level of personal success that I experienced while working on this production, I have sought to become more aware of the mechanisms at work within my body that make such connections possible. In retrospect it was not solely the work of Chekhov that made that experience with Hamlet possible. It was all the years of my training combined that allowed me the freedom of the body I experienced that day. As suggested by Chekhov and Suzuki, the process of becoming aware of the body and its full potential is an all-inclusive study that does not only take place in rehearsal, but it is a continuous study that occurs throughout a person’s life.
In a direct comparison of Chekhov’s and Suzuki’s methods, they do both contain the necessary elements to develop bodily awareness as outlined by Feldenkrais. However, the exercises in each training method challenge the actor in markedly different ways. Many of Chekhov’s exercises engage movement of the body through the psychology, whereas throughout Suzuki’s method he focuses directly on the movements of the body.

Although these approaches differ in how they train the actor, within either method, the actor receives very specific training. For instance, Chekhov’s psychological gesture would be a good tool to help connect the feelings and thoughts of the actor to movement upon the stage. Radiating, floating, flying, and molding exercises fulfill a similar role in further developing the connections between movement and psychology. Conversely, Suzuki’s method which begins with stamping upon the ground could be utilized to strengthen the actor that is unsure of the body’s connection to the ground or the actor that lacks the stamina required to perform the role. Building the relationship with the ground allows the actor to be centered and focused when working upon the stage. The intensive exercises throughout Suzuki’s method challenge the actor to push the body to its limits. In that regard, his method, if properly practiced, does develop a strong relationship between the ground and the actor’s body as well as it builds up stamina throughout the process. These methods may have key differences that lead to the development of very different types of actors. The most evident difference between these two methods is that throughout Chekhov’s process, he favors the use of the imagination or thought to develop the other components of action and Suzuki’s favors the use of movement to further develop the other components of action.

The importance of understanding the body as a whole is demonstrated in the writings of Moshé Feldenkrais, Michael Chekhov, and Tadashi Suzuki. Each writer believes that
observations of the body while moving can lead to a fuller understanding and utilization of the mind and body as a whole. To that end, each created a method of exercise that strengthens the connection between the psychology and the body. Although Feldenkrais’s book is not written specifically for actor training, in his method he seeks many of the same goals of bodily development as Chekhov and Suzuki. Originally developed by Feldenkrais as a means of self-rehabilitation, his corrective method combines the traditions of scientific methodology and the self defense art of Jujitsu. It is the world renowned status of Feldenkrais’s Method that makes it ideal for examining the development of bodily awareness as demonstrated in the theatre writings of Chekhov and Suzuki. Using Feldenkrais’s knowledge of how awareness develops in the body to examine the writings of both Chekhov and Suzuki, provides a view of these actor training methods that do incorporate all the necessary exercises that lead to the development of a deep connection and bodily awareness. A deep connection and awareness that develops the actor’s body/mind enabling it to reach hidden potentials of the human being.
WORKS CITED


