

**What Moves Me Keeps Me Here  
What Keeps Me Here Moves Me**

©Dennis Leri 2016

*To see is to forget the name of the thing one sees.*

Paul Valéry

*The 'how' has a great effect on what we see. To say that 'what we see' is more important than 'how we see it' is to think that 'how' has been settled and fixed. When you realize this is not the case, you realize that 'how' often affects 'what' we see.*

David Hockney

*Any life is made up of a single moment, the moment in which a man finds out, once and for all, who he is.*

Jorge Luis Borges

## **A Story**

A while back I ventured into a large and relatively complete Van Gogh retrospective at the DeYoung museum in San Francisco. Banking on the museum's promise of no waiting and no crowds I had decided to go early in the morning. Seems a lot of others got the same promise as the lines were long. Inside, crowds moved from room to room and from painting to painting with only a few attendees pausing to linger and engage with a painting. Most people it seems were attending to be able to say they attended. They seemed to move about looking without allowing themselves to 'see' or to be 'moved.'

The paintings were displayed chronologically, that is, they were ordered earlier to later. The more famous paintings were hung alongside the lesser known. But whether a painting affects us and may continue to affect us is not dependent on where it fits into a timeline. That is, later paintings don't necessarily indicate they are better nor do they necessarily indicate progress. And, neither is it necessarily the famous painting that grabs hold of us. It's been said that there's a kind of metabolism in our encounter with art. There is a notion that a piece of art is like a pineapple. Pineapple is a food rich in enzymes which when consumed both digests and is digested. One wonders: Are we eating it or is it eating us? Are we what we eat or what eats us or both? A work of art, one that affect us, can

'eat' at us. The effects can last longer, maybe even years longer than the few minutes or hours we actually spent viewing the work. The work is altered by observing it and likewise we--as if being observed by the work--are similarly altered. Happily or unhappily we are changed. (1)

Van Gogh's paintings are at once physical constructs with some canvasses holding layers and layers of paint. Yet, the physicality somehow contributes the overall effect of bearing witness to the artist's mental, emotional and spiritual struggles. After a few hours in the exhibit I was feeling feverish, myself on the verge of both implosion and explosion. I had to get out. Surely by chance, I found my way to another wing of the museum, the one housing ancient Asian artifacts. There were no crowds. The rooms were quiet and still and not overly lit by artificial light. I turned a corner, entered a room and in a glass cube nearly in the center of that room was a two millennia old ceramic vase the color of red earth. It was wrought by an anonymous artist. Being potentially functional it could be said to have a practical purpose and so it could be called the work of a craftsman. Yet, something, maybe some aspect, maybe some part not of its shape and not of its materiality manifested the serenity of its creator and its creation. One felt that serenity as the "Peace that Passeth Understanding." (2) And with that feeling of peace, that quietness at peace with the ambient sounds, there was a stillness at peace with the movement of walking around the vase. The time of its creation and its creator somehow mingled with my time, my now and my here. And, as if on an island of time in a sea of time on a planet of time and completely other than clock time, there emerged an occurrence of what some call the Timeless and others Deep Time. It was unbidden and came without conscious preparation. As I was being moved by the dilation of and merging of two presents I was held in that moment: the presencing of the present and the absencing of absence. For the time being the artist and I were fellow Time Beings in the words of Dōgen Zenji founder of Soto Zen. (3) Time Beings are inseparably related by sharing what is *not named* past, present or future. As if seen by the vase, as if brought home by the room, as if Rilke's words would chart a new direction.

denn da ist keine Stelle,  
die dich nicht sieht. Du musst dein Leben ändern.

Rainer Marie Rilke

Because there is no place

that does not see you. You must alter your life.

Bernd Jäger translation (4)

for here there is no place

that does not see you. You must change your life.

Stephen Mitchell translation (5)

**Seeing seeing: Either/Or => Or/Or => Either/Or => Or/Or =>**



Most psychological textbooks state that when observing the Rubin Faces/Vase images above that we may see 2 faces *or* 1 vase if we see anything at all. It's usually unequivocally proposed that we can only see and identify one or the other but not both simultaneously. But, is that really the case? While studying both psychology and art at the University I found that, in the Psychology Department, either/or (faces or vase) was the orthodox answer. In the Art Department, amongst my fellow students, many could see both faces and the vase at the same time. I found corroboration in Arnold Ehrenzweig's *The Hidden Order of Art*, (6) where the author relates his success teaching art students to see both at the same time. In his words the shift is to *or/or*. The shift becomes not a horizontal one of either faces or vase but a vertical collapse of surface into depth. The question is how to be able to reproduce it, how to make it into a practice and then to what end?

Figure/ground perception usually resolves itself fairly quickly into a pattern where a figure is in the foreground and something else is in the background. Normally things stay that way. But here a sudden shift can happen: faces to vase or vase to faces. In the Rubin image above the vase/faces tend to flip back and forth. Now faces, now vase, now faces and so on. We tend to identify with one or

the other. Or we are held by one more than another. And then inevitably a shift of figure/ground will take place. Mostly the shift happens all too quickly to even notice. We may never realize what the art students realized: that we have some ability to learn how to control the speed of the shifting and the duration of the shift. But, we can learn to dilate the length of the shift and to thereby defer identifying with one image or another. The interval of shift can be inhabited. And, coming to know that deepened duration we can differentiate naming from perceiving. As in Valery's quote at the head of the article, seeing for the artist means forgetting the name of the thing one sees. We just put off arriving at the name so as to not forsake what's potentially right in front of us. To stay in and with the special kind of temporal duration that defines the or/or state means we have to quiet and still our everyday perception and cognition. Choosing the 'either' or the 'or' is generally due to unconscious habits and biases. Dwelling in the or/or state can lead to truly novel images and imaging. The 'who' that dwells is not the same 'who' that can only flip states. As a start we learn to unlearn our default choices with their convenient names. Later, novel learnings can eliminate any direct need to unlearn. More on this point when we examine *Awareness Through Movement*.

### **The landscape and inscape of lessons**

How does *Awareness Through Movement* work? What really goes on in a lesson? How can we operationally understand the 'how' and the 'what' of the lesson sequence and its consequences? Sequence and consequence: structure reorganized by function for deeper meaning.

Moshe Feldenkrais said more than once that the recognizable beneficial effects of a lesson (that is, what we put on brochures, websites and Facebook pages to attract students) -- ease of movement, less pain, gracefulness, centeredness, joy, etc. -- are really trivial side effects relative to what a lesson can truly offer. But, we don't experience them as trivial. Mostly, the side effects are what keep us coming back to classes and seeking out individual sessions. Yet, he is right and we know that he is when we feel our lives and our life trajectories to be changing. The process level of a lesson is one where figure/ground gets reconfigured by reorganizing not only the picture of ourselves, our self-image, but also the means of making a self-image. The so-called *means whereby*, the *how* of the what. Each self-image is itself an Image-of-Achievement encoding environmental contingencies like forces and Feldenkrais's famous motives for

movement: fight or flight, feeding, and breeding. They are schemas or patterns for action rather than an image of a collection of sequenced muscular contractions. Any time spent with the Alexander Yanai lessons centering on the Primary Image (roughly centered in the middle third of the 300 series of Alexander Yanai) will reward the student with a concrete embodiment of an unfinished but refinable image indispensable to self-understanding. According to Feldenkrais, any lesson that does not refine and stabilize the Primary Image is just exercise.

We usually start lessons with a scan, that is, by studying our contact with the floor. There are many viable ways to scan. We may first, for example, attend to the sensation of the left heel in contact with the floor. We are given options for what we may find by simply directing our attention to the left heel in this moment and at that location. We might be asked to not actually move the foot to create a sensation but rather to move our attention to locate the *thereness* of the foot as signified by one particular sensation or another. We are invited to invoke notions of weight, shape, clarity of contact, temperature, color, vividness or whatever that can be appended to the location. We repeat the process with the right heel. We are then asked to compare the two sides and to make “more or less” distinctions placing each side’s contact along a continuum with one side being heavier or lighter, higher or lower, rougher or smoother, cooler or warmer, more vague or more distinct, bigger or smaller and so on. Here, our concern is with “more or less.” Not usually noted is that the difference is not in either foot but in the measuring and joining of the two feet, the two sides. (7) And so, to go further with this example, we scan from heel to heel, side to side, upward to the back of the head, 1) locating what’s there for us and then comparing and thus coupling the two sides (spatial distinctions) plus 2) comparing the aggregate at one moment relative to a previous moment (temporal distinction binding spatial distinction). In bringing the two sides together in our field of attention we make evident a self-image. In carrying out a lesson and comparing the effects from one moment to another we can gauge quality and quantity of change. According to Psychophysics all of our judgments default to distinctions of either 1) more or less or 2) same or different (8) . We all come to know that particular sensations can and do change. We learn that sensations are held differently in different composite images. At any point in the lesson sequence as we progressively substitute one sensation with another and as the temporal composites do change the real change comes in first realizing how that shift takes place. Only then can we inhabit the *how* of the new configuration. (9)

## **That Which Is Not Prohibited Is Allowed**

*The universe is constructed in such a manner that it can see itself.*

G. Spencer-Brown

*Those who live outside the law must be honest.*

Bob Dylan

In G. Spencer-Brown's little meta-mathematical cult classic book, *The Laws of Form* (10), we can observe how something can come from seeming nothing by drawing a distinction. If one is prepared to apprehend the first act of distinction we can see how the distinguisher making the distinction is mirrored in the distinguishing act.

"We take as given the idea of distinction and the idea of indication, and that one cannot make an indication without drawing a distinction. We take therefore the form of distinction for the form." (11)

What is distinguished implicates the distinguisher. Different distinctions give rise to differing distinguishers. Erasing, unlearning or substituting distinctions is a way to reconnect with the act of distinguishing. We can read Spencer-Brown's account of how he unlearned the idea of number and replaced it with the notion of an indication or index. That is, before you can assign a number you must first indicate and then bind with a number the thing counted. Upon emptying a bag of marbles I ask how many marbles are before me? First I have to distinguish the marbles from all that is non-marble by mentally or actually pointing out the marbles. G. Spencer-Brown uses one simple mark in his unique notational system, alone or employed according to simple rules, to compute with those indications to generate a profound 'calculus of indications.' A coherent arithmetic and algebra emerge out of at first simply drawing a distinction. Eventually, as in every formal system, a contradiction arises:  $a = \sim a$  ( $a$  equals *non-a*). He demonstrates that by allowing the contradiction to stand (as in the Ehrenzweig's or/or-ing of the Rubin figure) we can integrate seeming contradiction via an emergent idea of Time. Time will bind and make manifest what a static first order logic disallows. He calls his temporal category the Imaginary. Lest we think the Imaginary is phantasy or illusion, it can be represented in mathematics by utilizing imaginary numbers like the square root

of minus one ( $\sqrt{-1}$  or  $i$ ) whose solution is both +1 and -1. That is, like the Rubin image, the solution flips from one to the other. But the duration of the shifting is not nothing. It should be noted that the temporality that arises out of contradiction has gained a place in many fields but especially Biology (see, for example, the work of Francisco Varela) and the so-called Life Sciences with their time bound processes. In actuality, as an organism develops we can say that  $a = \sim a$ . Think caterpillar into moth. An organism to maintain itself must constantly transform itself into other than it was and into what it will be. In *Awareness Through Movement* we are fusing our felt sense of the world with that which makes it possible to forge new modes of meeting the world and understanding ourselves and others. We actually find relief in the contingent nature of our self-knowing. What is could be different. What is different could be me.

In lesson 266 from the Alexander Yanai collection, one is asked to observe seeing. The lesson (a variation of a coordinating flexors and extensors lesson) conjoins observing our habits of seeing with continual self-observation. The bringing into relief (figure from ground) of gaps in our seeing (and hence in the jagged movement of the eyes, the inflexibility of the chest and perturbances to the breathing, etc.) should not cause us to see the habit as something to be gotten rid of. We, instead, realize that our habits were once historically viable and relevant but have now possibly outlived their usefulness. But we can reverse engineer their emergence by submerging them into the processes that gave rise to them. The enduring fit of a habit loses its hold when either the organism or the environment changes too much or too fast. In Gregory Bateson's words the survival of the "fit," the coupling of organism and environs, is what persists and a new fit is needed when change demands it. In sweeping the eyes over the room one notices there are breaks in what we see but interestingly not so in how or what we observe. Coming to "see" as in seeing as knowing is contrasted and distinguished from perceptually using the eyes, what some would call 'looking.' The percept, biased by habits of use, is at once connected and disconnected from the present moment. The lesson asks us to re-organize and re-con-figure our perception in consort with the processes giving rise to the percept and to connect us to the tangible flow of our observing. A new mode of action is employed wherein awareness integrates what consciousness can't. What once was useful is not replaced but is rather reconnected to that which produced it. Our new habit integrates awareness with action.

A threshold is crossed. All our thoughts, feelings, sensations and actions are folded into a profound movement of life. To be aware is to hold nothing back, to lean into life, to be able to knowingly sustain the very full feeling of the certainty of uncertainty. When in the midst of uncertainty if we don't reach out for some familiar and ephemeral mooring but rather embrace it, only then can the novel, the fresh and the unique appear for us. The either/or of our default choosing as it passes into the or/or of our observing re-emerges as a new figure on a different ground. The sway of life, the enduring duration, the dilation of the dynamics of the shift, the Time Being's sense of wonder in the midst of it all has many names and one is Beauty. Forget the name and be Beauty. What moves me, keeps me here. What keeps me here, moves me.

**End**

- 1) The idea is explored in a later section.
- 2) "This peace passeth all understanding; its calm blessedness transcends the reach of human thought; it can be known only by the inner experience of the believer...This peace will transcend our ability to understand it."  
Philippians 4:7
- 3) <<http://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/shobo/011uji.pdf>>. Jiyu Kennett Roshi, founder of Shasta Abbey, was my first Buddhist teacher. She taught me almost everything about Nothing.
- 4) <[http://www.bernd-jager.com/pdf/writings/Rilke-s\\_Archaic\\_Torso\\_of\\_Apollo.pdf](http://www.bernd-jager.com/pdf/writings/Rilke-s_Archaic_Torso_of_Apollo.pdf)>
- 5) < <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/archaic-torso-apollo> > Mitchell
- 6) Ehrenzweig, A.; *The Hidden Order of Art* Publisher: University of California Press; Revised ed. edition (May 24, 1971)
- 7) What is of greatest importance is realizing that the differences are not in this foot or that foot but are in the *relation* that couples the more with the less (now) or the same with the different (now and then). That is, a foot is neither heavier nor lighter inherently but is so only in the measuring. With an aggregate of sensations, the composite image, comparing now with then requires a peculiar trick of self-remembering. It is in the coupling and decoupling of relations that we form new patterns of acting, thinking, sensing and feeling. It is inherent in Feldenkrais's work that reconnecting to the phylogenetic ground of action allows new patterns to emerge. In lessons the applied 'archeology of life forming processes' allow us to dig into the natural history of the evolutionary development of the nervous system. Feldenkrais's 'nervous system' is almost isomorphic with the great Milton Erickson's notion of the 'unconscious': the

reservoir of all of our previous learnings, learning states and learning processes. I have intentionally not dealt with the functional content of lessons which tend to obscure the relevance of learning to employ our faculties of judgment.

8) Link, S. W. (1992). *The Wave Theory of Difference and Similarity*, Hillsdale, NJ. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

9) Outline of scan:

- 1) Move attention to Left foot.
- 2) Inventory sensations there.
- 3) Repeat 1 & 2 with Right Foot
- 4) Compare, contrast and judge where and on what continuum our sensations lie.
- 5) Continue 1-4 upward from feet to head.
- 6) Construct a composite image to use as our baseline for change.
- 7) Enact some portion of the lesson.
- 8) Then repeat 1-6
- 9) Compare the two composites, the now and the then and determine whether they are the same or different.
- 10) Repeat 1-9

10) Spencer-Brown, George; *Laws of Form* Publisher: Bohmeier; German Language edition (1997) Language: English, German ISBN-10: 3890943217, ISBN-13: 978-3890943213

11) Ibid.

### **Addendum**

I'm a big fan of the science and philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce, Rene Thom and G. Spencer-Brown. The quotes in the article above and the quotes below taken together make a kind of after the fact sense. That is, they lay out a wardrobe that seems to fit the spirit and practice of Feldenkrais's work. Peirce was a thinker of profound depth and breadth founding both Pragmatism and Semiotics as well as making fundamental contributions to many fields of science including extending in profoundly important ways the work of Gustav Fechner. Rene Thom was major force in 20th century Mathematics and Biology. Thom's excerpt below points to a way to contrast art and mathematics. I worked for a time for Spencer-Brown trying to organize a presence for him in the poetics community in San Francisco. One could probably not find a more unique individual. A leading figure in phenomenological philosophy and psychology,

Bernd Jäger was my teacher, mentor and friend. Robert Duncan was a San Francisco poet and again a mentor. The fragment of his poem resonates with my decades of joyful immersion in *Awareness Through Movement*. And thanks to Gay Scott and Carolyn Fleg for help in editing this article.

*Logic follows Ethics and both follow Aesthetics*  
C. S. Peirce

At the root of “the aesthetic” one finds “the sacred”. What is “the sacred”? The original idea is that all behavior, starting with that of animals, is controlled by the fact that when the animal perceives a form in its presence, reactions of attraction and repulsion are released with regard to that form, whether they be visual, auditory, olfactory, and so on. In even the most rudimentary cases, one finds these reactions of attraction and repulsion.

I believe that the sense of the sacred in human beings is characterized by the fact that this axis of attraction/ repulsion can, in some sense, become self-referencing through being compactified by a point at infinity. This point at infinity is precisely what we call the sacred. Stated differently, a sense of the sacred is aroused every time we find ourselves in the presence of a form which appears to be endowed with infinite power, and which is simultaneously attractive and repulsive. As these two infinities are in opposition, one becomes immobilized relative to this form: Its fascination causes motion to cease. Because such a situation is intolerable for very long, certain accommodations emerge, which relax this paralysis through the phenomenon of sacralization.

In a certain sense, I believe that Art goes far beyond the procedures employed by mathematicians. Those procedures are under very tight control. They are even under social control. The artist’s methods are not free of a certain amount of social control, but art objects themselves are not very susceptible to being judged by objective criteria, nor even some kind of useful sociological criteria.

René Thom

## **Archaic Torso of Apollo**

We cannot know his legendary head  
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso  
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,  
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,

gleams in all its power. Otherwise  
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could  
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs  
to that dark center where procreation flared.

Otherwise this stone would seem defaced  
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders  
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:

would not, from all the borders of itself,  
burst like a star: for here there is no place  
that does not see you. You must change your life.

Rainer Maria Rilke: Bernd Jäger translation

## **Archaischer Torso Apollos**

Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,  
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber  
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,  
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,  
sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug  
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen  
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen  
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.  
Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz

unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz  
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle  
und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern  
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,  
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.

Rilke

### **Oftentimes I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow**

Oftentimes I am permitted to return to a meadow  
as if it were a given property of the mind  
that certain bounds hold against chaos,

that is a place of first permission,  
everlasting omen of what is.

Robert Duncan