



ERIN MANNING

RELATIONSCAPES

Movement, Art, Philosophy

Interlude: A Mover's Guide to Standing Still

“It is more difficult to stand than to move” (Feldenkrais 1981, 44). Standing still is a metastable activity: the stillness demands precise adaptation to the micro-movements of a shifting equilibrium. To stand still you have to move.

Everyone sways. You may think you're standing still, but actually you're drifting, shifting slightly to the left, your ankle twitching as your weight moves to the ball of your foot, your knee bending slightly as you take in a breath. As Bruce Schechter noted after trying to measure the stillness of people standing: “It doesn't matter whether you are feeble or fit, the fact is you have never stood stock still in your life” (2001, n.p.). Standing still requires constant correction. These are not conscious corrections. They are virtual micromovements that move through the feeling of standing still. When these micromovements are felt as such, they take over the event of standing, and you experience co-contraction: you lose your balance.

Stillness is always on its way to movement. When you stand still, you don't feel the “how” of movement stalling unless you're asked to feel the stillness. Then you find you can't stop thinking about how you're moving. You feel your wobbly ankle, your thoughts moving, your nose itching, your back aching. All you really want to do is move through the movement. Not that surprising, then, that when J. J. Collins and C. J. de Luca asked participants to stand still, they found that the foot's center of pressure “wriggl[ed] around like a demented eel” (qtd. in Schechter 2001, n.p.).

Standing still is often associated to posture. “Stand still!” sounds to me like “Stand up straight!” Yet, like “stillness,” posture is elusive. Posture is less a stopping of movement than a passing-through. If standing still is a shifting between thousands of micromovements in the making, posture is how its incipient action is felt.

Moshe Feldenkrais defines posture as “dynamic equilibrium.” He suggests that posture is how we move *through*. Posture is how we carry our movement stilling. This movement stilling is allied to the movements of experiential space-time. We move with the reaching-toward of experience as it moves us.

Posture is not a stopping. It is a stilling of the between of the body’s reconfigurations in extensive and intensive space-time. “Between one displacement and the next there is always a moment when the body is, practically speaking, not changing position significantly” (Feldenkrais 1981, 47). Every shift depends on a moving-through. Posture is the quality of the moving-through. It is not a position, not something to aim for or to attain: it is a movement with movement reconfiguring. For Feldenkrais, the relative immobility of the betweenness of posture is not something associated only with humans. All animals have this quality as part of their movement reconfigurations. Feldenkrais calls it “the special characteristic of a given body” (1981, 47).

Asking you to stand still is like asking you to become aware of your special characteristic. Why does it feel so punitive? Perhaps because we think we should not move. Because we believe we should have the capacity to stop. But we can’t. And so we move, and we try to hide that moving by ignoring the movement moving. But the more we ignore the movement within stillness, the more we lose our balance. To be balanced is in fact to move with micromovements moving. In Feldenkrais’s terms, it is to become aware of how our special characteristic moves-with our body moving. “All species of animals have a characteristic form of posture, which usually we think of as standing, although dynamically this is the configuration of the body from which any act is made” (Feldenkrais 1981, 48). Dynamically speaking, we can still standing. As long as we keep moving through posture. Moving through movement stilling means dancing posture’s small dance.²⁷

A posture is a quality of movement stilling that infects moving. The strange thing about posture is that you can only alter it from within a movement moving. If you try to stop the movement, you don’t get a single posture, you get a multitude of micropostures that move in tandem with the rejigging of micromovements. Stopping is virtually impossible.

Posture is less a stance than a tendency of momentariness. It is a metastable stilling that leads toward a spinal spiral around which all movement turns. You never reach it once and for all. Posture is a dynamic that is co-constitutive of the body's tendencies for reconfiguration. That's why there is no ideal posture: if the tendency of your intensive movement is a fidget or a squirm, the quality of your posture will itself be a squirm in the making. Neither can a posture be an end-point. Beware of those who tell you to improve your posture. They're probably the same ones who told you to stand still.

Posture is the intensive magnitude of a movement-forming. It is not the incipency of a movement as much as the passing-through toward that incipency. It is the zero-point of absolute movement, the quasi chaos on the cusp of an incipient change in direction.

When we move, we move around the posture's quasi-chaotic center. It is quasi-chaotic because it contains in their incipency all of the tendencies for reconfiguration of a movement moving. The most frequent movement for which a standing body prepares itself is a movement around. This turning around the spinal axis will generally revolve around a whole body moving. If the head turns, the shoulders will follow, and then the hips, the knees, the feet. This seemingly organic movement can take many surprising forms. Anywhere along the way, the incipient nextness can be dislodged, and the movement's equilibrium can be altered. "The preliminary ingredient movements do not usually evoke the final act" (Feldenkrais 1981, 93). The quasi chaos of the movement's immanent centering is itself a change of equilibrium, an individuating of the becoming-body of the movement.

Part of what keeps movement out of equilibrium is the way it worlds. Every movement is not simply of the body but moves-with the associated milieu of the body-world nexus that enfolds it. Reaching-toward can be a trip as much as it can be a touch. "It is not always at all easy to decide whether a particular movement has originated as an immediate response to a provocation from the environment, or if we ourselves have initiated the stream of motor activity" (Feldenkrais 1981, 139).

Standing still makes felt the incipient force of micromovements reconfiguring the body's stilling. Since we're not so busy getting somewhere, we can feel our movement moving still. The feeling of losing our balance is amplified by the quietening of the reconfiguration. This is not yet consciousness of a movement. What we experience are virtual forces recombining, microperceptions shifting. Consciousness comes after the fact, when we realize we've lost our balance. A

shift in space-time makes us aware of the displacement. We know what we've felt when we are no longer in the feeling.

If we were conscious of the quality of our movement—our posture—passing through every reconfiguration of the body moving, we wouldn't move much. We would be too busy tweaking our movement as it was happening. In fact, we would be trying to stop-start the movement, getting in the way of the reconfigurations of the pure plastic rhythm of movement moving. It would be like trying to get at the force of movement to alter its trajectory by holding it back.

Moving with movement requires an altered idea of consciousness. This consciousness is not of the body but with the body moving. This is what Feldenkrais and Paxton call "awareness," a feeling-with of the body moving. This feeling-with is a virtual dance. It is too quick for conscious thought, and yet it composes with it as a layering of felt experience in the making. As José Gil writes: "The immanence of body awareness emerges on the surface of consciousness and henceforth constitutes its essential element" (2006, n.p.).

We are aware of the quality of our movement without being conscious of it. You might ask: what about pain? Aren't we conscious of pain when it "gets in the way" of our movement moving? Pain produces a shift in awareness that makes us conscious of how we can't move, but this consciousness is not of the movement per se. It is consciousness of how movement hurts. This awareness interrupts the intensive magnitude of a durational attitude. Pain shifts the texture of a movement. It makes the quality of the movement felt: a particular intensity in the durational attitude of the movement has differentiated itself. We feel the safe parameters of movement moving and resist those that cause a resurgence of pain. The negative of the movement has made the movement's edge appear for consciousness. As Whitehead writes: "The negative perception is the triumph of consciousness" (1929/1978, 161).

For Whitehead, consciousness is always felt after the fact. Consciousness is a recollection of a movement having moved. We cannot be conscious of posture as such because it is a durational attitude of a becoming-movement. It is the breath of movement's in-gathering. The quality of posture is expressed virtually in the displacement that follows. Posture is the threshold, the incipient grace, the texture that contributes to having known what it felt like to move. It has a consistency, which explains why other people can recognize postural tendencies when they watch you move. But you cannot know it as such because how you move movement is not something you are conscious of.

To be conscious of movement is to have known that movement moved you. Movement felt is available to consciousness only in terms of how it was left behind as a trace for the next movement moving. We are conscious of our lower back pain, not in terms of how we pass through posture, but in terms of how that pain incites us to invent new ways of moving. We are conscious of how that pain keeps us from moving solely out of habit.

“Consciousness flickers, and even at its brightest, there is a small focal region of clear illumination, and a large penumbral region of experience which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension” (Whitehead 1929/1978, 267). To have known what it felt like to feel pain is not the same as to have known how it altered our movement moving. The recombinations are infinite. We now move with new composite tendencies that realign the taking form of the moving body. Consciousness is of the pain, and of the lack of pain. Consciousness is how the irradiation of experience gathers itself into a final form. This final form is not the experience as a whole. It is what Whitehead calls the *acme of emphasis*.

Standing still foregrounds the quality of the activity of relation of micromovements necessary in the stilling of the body's temptation to lose its balance. Losing balance is the quickest way to get moving. Find the balance moving, and move with the imbalance as it corrects itself. Feel the quality of the movement, its tendencies, its potential directionalities. Create an instable body, an elastic stance. Be aware of movement coursing through the stillness. Feel the dynamism of the force of movement beginning to take form. Call this incipient action.

27. Nora Heilmann evokes Steve Paxton's small dance in one of her recent dance experiments. With Paxton's guidance, she defines the small dance as "the little movements around the skeleton that help you balance." Here, in Heilmann's words, is an exercise of Paxton's to find and work with the small dance: "Find your balance. Find your concentration. Easy breathing. Watch the small dance, the little movements around the skeleton that help you balance. Relax your coccyx. Relax your sacrum. Long inhalations. Long exhalations. Diaphragm moving down with inhalation, up with exhalation. Feel your weight on the floor. Agreeing with gravity. Organs relaxing down into the bowl of the pelvis. Bowl of the pelvis receiving the organs. Easy sternum. Easy means: observe the small dance. Feel the dome of your skull suspending upwards. Feel the length of your spine extending through your head towards the ceiling. Relax your shoulders. Feel the direction of your arms falling away from the spine. Without changing that direction, find the smallest stretch in that direction. Release. Can it be smaller? Where does it start? Where could it start? What is the smallest thing we can perceive? What is the smallest stretch? The smallest fall? The edge of movement? Relax your shoulders. Relax your arms. In the direction that your arms are hanging, without changing that direction, find the smallest stretch. Release. Feel your finger prints, beyond the fingers, pointing downwards. Feel the small dance. Adjust your mind to the continuous changes. Imagine but don't do it: imagine you are taking a step with your right foot. Imagine but don't do it: imagine you are taking a step with your right foot. With your left foot. Right, left right left, right, left. Stand. Balance. Feel the small dance" (2006).