

## **Feeding the Fish – Learning to breathe again**

In the book *Your Inner Fish*, Neil Shubin explains 500 million years ago '...jawless filter feeding fish appeared in the sea', 100 million years later bony fish evolved with muscles attached to the newly formed rod of bones which contracted alternately from side to side to produce the '... characteristic 'S' shaped flexing of the body that resulted in swimming.'

### **Simple, effortless, tranquil, seamless ...we were once that fish**

Since finding land we have continued to adapt to our environment, swapping gills for lungs, fins for limbs and scales for skin, and as a result of continuing dexterity and refinement, the job of the spine has changed.

No longer the only source of motion, we now rely on arms and hands to reach and grasp legs and feet to step and stride forth and a head that thinks us into the future, taking us away from the present, away from the body, away from who we are.

My current research and performance practice is concerned with re-establishing the connection with our lost ancestor body, to learn from the fish, to see what may arrive as a result of finding new waves of motion and the ideal of moving with ease and fluidity.

I began to recognise my lost body whilst training to be a Feldenkrais practitioner. Here, I was given tools to notice, questions to investigate and introduced to a new body, my body, to navigate and explore. The Feldenkrais Method allows time to discover movement as it could be, rather than as it is or what it has become. A method that introduces breath back in to nurture, inform, sustain and revive.

To support my practice I have chosen a range of ATM lessons that I felt engaged with the spine and particularly the ribs in a way that encouraged new sensations and the potential to breathe whilst moving...something that I realised prior to my Feldenkrais learning that I wasn't very good at!

I then explore the learning from the lesson as part of my studio performance practice. Here I ask the questions, what do I notice, how do I move now, what does moving feel like now?

With access, awareness and practice, I began to notice space between my ribs was providing room for breath to expand and a gradual increase in movement articulation in my spine. My torso was developing a new language, feeding the fish body. I soon realised how this practice made a shift from linear moving and direct pathways that can become narrow, known and uninteresting. The 'S' bend motion of the spine invites indirectness, a meandering approach that involves more of you...more of you to notice and experience. This movement has an open explorative nature, in dialogue with itself, with many conversations, suggestions and choices, creating a smooth and uninterrupted flow of motion. In contrast to the monologue which has become more prominent in the human spine; stunted, stuttering and staccato...mostly using the motion of forwards, up and down, twisting sometimes, when need arises. This linear approach is shorter and quicker representing current times where life seems to get faster and more instant by the day. The movement of the fish allows time to explore, discover, experience and breathe; to know and not know

Learning from the fish and the movement potential of the ribs allows for breadth and detail in the movement possibilities of the spine, where the linear can combine with the sagittal, incorporating all the delicate diagonals and curious curves in between. Reintroducing articulation allows for rotation and upwards, twist and down. A limitless range of sequential pathways that can inspire, wake up and provoke new moving, broadening the sensation of self; offering a new awareness and encouraging the potential to wait and see, rather than know and do. Moving in a way that allows the body to lead, swerving, without restriction, to discover a freedom of motion that we once had.

This practice allows breath back in.

As human beings we learn to hold ourselves and move in a way that fulfils the lifestyle we have acquired. The consequences of this learning can hinder our moving potential, cause us to get stuck in habitual patterns and to hold our breath or at least be unaware of our breathing. Moving and breathing are essential for any living organism and what better way to be reminded of that than through the simplicity and innocence of the fish.

### **ATM lesson – Lengthening the sides - Breathing**