

6: JOINTEDNESS

In this installment, we consider jointedness as a condition in which we live and move. The anatomical facts we'll consider stay general: the directional affordances of the three large joint areas that make up the legs, and how they coordinate to allow transition. We'll use the condition of jointedness to think about locomotion—the capacity to move through the world—direction, movement, and rest.

As you encounter joint thinking, keep direction, movement, and rest actively in mind as storytelling considerations. How do we move through the telling of a story? What are the mechanics of setting something in motion, or of changing its direction? How does foregrounding the transitional work of different types of joints create appealing ways to move through a telling?

Anatomical Facts: A Leg Joint Exploration

You'll need a space to walk around in for this one. Keep a piece of paper nearby to record a few words toward the end of it. Instead of using ideokinesis type image work here, we will work through the mode of experiential anatomy: learning the structure of the anatomy through focused, moving, experiential explorations.

You can use the audio guide (find the link in the back pages), or just read the script below and then guide yourself back through it in a 5-minute walking exploration.

Let's think about what the leg does when we go for a walk. Start standing still.

If you're standing still, your joints are stacked in a stable structure. The combination of the stability of the bone stack and the strength of your musculature allow you to counterbalance the force of gravity with an upward thrust. This counterbalance feels like rest. It's an equilibrium. If you want to move across the room, that stack line has to be interrupted. A softening happens at the back of the knee — accompanied by a swinging at the hip, accompanied by a complex of hinging and rotating at the ankle — accompanied by a topographical adjustment to the surface of the ground that simultaneously transfers the weight of the now-falling body into the ground, through the many bones and joints of the feet. Take a walk, mainly walking straight forward, shifting your attention around, now to the softening behind the knee, now to the swinging of the hip, now to the negotiations of the ankle and the raft of bones that is a foot.

If you need to change direction, the ball and socket meeting point of the femur (the thigh bone) and the hip accommodate that. The muscles of the upper leg constitute a steering apparatus to swivel the bone around, working the bone like a sail. The large muscles in the back and front of the leg (the hamstrings, the quadriceps) constitute the power of the legs to motor forward. Experiment with changing direction from standing, and while walking. Experiment with giving yourself different amounts of push from the hamstrings at the back of the leg, so that your walking changes speeds.

Bring your attention to your lower leg. As your knee folds and the thigh swings forward, the lower leg swings out over the ankle to let you transfer weight through your feet, and then as that transfer is completed through to the toes, the lower leg swings forward from the knee so the heel can make contact with the ground. The momentum of controlled falling helps carry you forward, and you pass through standing on that leg, as the other one completes its cycle.

Bring yourself to standing again, to feel the stack. Then go for a walk. Start slowly, trying to focus on one joint at a time, tracking the action in the knee, the action in the hip, the action in the ankle. Then imagine them as a three-part harmony, a pair of three-part harmonies, one in each leg, and try to perceive these six large

cooperations that have to happen to carry you around the room. See what happens in your muscles—how the balance of work shifts around—if you inhibit the range of motion at different joints. If you walk without bending your knees in a goofy shuffle, or walk without straightening your knees. If you don't allow your thigh to swing forward then you'll have to pick up half of the pelvis and carry it forward. What if you don't allow the ankles to leave a flexed position?

Go back to normal walking, the kind without any intentional inhibitions.

Now think about facing, or direction. Start standing still, then allow one of your legs to rotate at the hip. Allow your body to join that leg in defining a new front. Repeat a few times. Then, setting yourself into walking motion, try walking in a curving path, and pay attention to the small, constant rotation inward or outward (depending on whether you curve in or out) that supports this change of direction.

Go to your paper. Think about descriptive verbs that interest you about the action at each joint, just derived from your own experiential sense of action at that join. For example the action at the knee could be described as softening (the stack), hinging, swinging, folding, buckling... Write key verbs for each joint. When you get to the hip, think both about the forward swinging action and the rotational possibilities.

Writing Prompts

Think about your piece of writing as time-lapse capture of a body moving through space. An accumulation of positions. The body/the story's movement includes both rest and action, stability and instability. Perch and flight.

The body of writing is imagined as a concert of elements that come together in joints. What are the elements, the units, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, sections? Or perhaps passages, voices, moods, perspectives?

Note: as with all my prompts, grasp without judgment onto any way of making sense of the game. What does it mean to move from one story beat to the next through a soft hinging action? I don't know, but I can invent answers. Maybe I'll start with the idea of a soft opening in one of the possibilities in play in a scene. As always, the games are useful insofar as they support you as you glide into patterns you're not yet familiar with. The only wrong answer is to agonize over what the right answer is.

Here are two paths into a body to entertain in mind. The first is a kind of puppet body. The second is a metaphorical body that maps onto a human one.

Puppet Body Game

Imagine your writing voice or the voice of your narrator as a puppet made of joined together elements. It might be useful to think of those elements in somewhat rhetorical terms — a cap of questions, a string made of partial statements, a metallic accusation, a pool of lyrical beatitudes, a windowpane of memory fragments, a quiver of thought arrows. Alternately it might be the elements that make up the stuff of your story — names, histories, environmental factors, key images or image types, event types.

Or it might be more accessible to think in material terms and postpone the rhetorical terms for later. A key tied to a tin cup welded to a glass vial stuffed with weeds. (Maybe you even want to make a puppet!)

What types of joints form between those elements?

What is the range and type of movement made possible by those joints?

Don't feel limited to the model of human jointedness here.

Sketch out your puppet body in some way. Make notes for yourself— 1) about the types of movement at each joint; 2) about the gross motor action possible when sets of joints coordinate to move whole limbs.

Retell a borrowed story paying attention to passages of stillness or stability and passages of transition or motion. Exaggerate the feeling of stillness when you find one. Let the momentum drop. When you are ready to move, choose a joint from your puppet model, and try to set a transition in motion using your notes about that joint's type of movement. If this is too abstract, think about rhetorical verbs (question, elide, augment, underline, pause...) that share the movement quality you attributed to the joint.

Consider whether the story ends by disappearing, still in motion, over the horizon, or by coming to stillness.

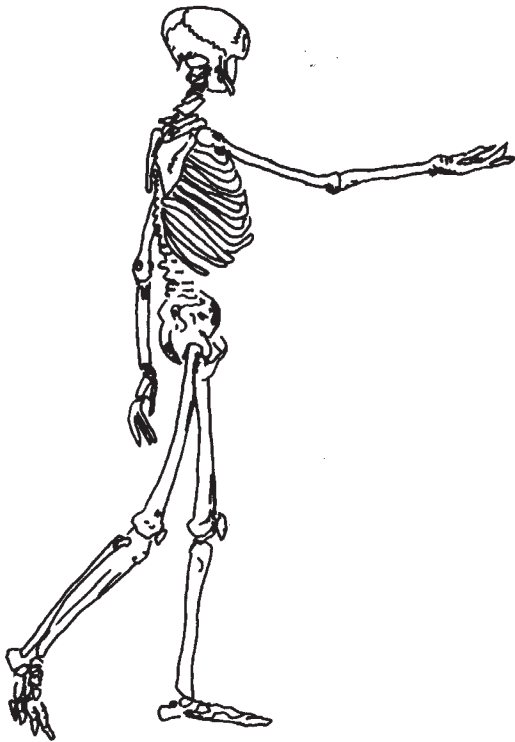
Human Analogy Body Game

Go to your notes from the experiential anatomy walking portion, the descriptive verbs.

Create sets of three, an ankle, a knee, a hip word. Feel free to re-use verbs in new combinations. Call each set of three a "leg."

Retell a borrowed story paying attention to passages of stillness or stability and passages of transition or motion. Exaggerate the feeling of stillness when you find one. In these passages of stability, notice the layers that stack onto each other to create a balance. When you are ready for your scene to move, choose a leg, and try to activate all three verbs in concert. If the movement verbs feel abstract or untranslatable to a writing process, pair them with rhetorical verbs (question, elide, augment, underline, pause, reconsider, multiply...) that share something (an energy, an effect) with the movement quality you attributed to the joint.

Consider whether the story ends by disappearing, still in motion, over the horizon, or by coming to stillness.



Or: Gross Analogy

Before retelling your borrowed story, write answers to each of these questions, recording the first thing that comes to mind. Record them in a scatter around a page.

Think about legs as the things that propel the tempo of action, the things that gain ground. What are the legs of your story?

What gives way, knee-like, to allow the strongest and most forceful part of the story to swing forward. What quick, responsive structure navigates the new information over which the story moves, that is, what is the story's landing gear, on what ground is it landing and what does that ground require in terms of shock absorption? Is there an alternation in the action, and if so, how do you define the two sides of the story, its right and left, which must alternate to move forward? What is the difference between telling your story as it lands on even, frictionless terrain, and over rough terrain? Does it move only forward? Does it ever move backward? Sideways? Change direction? Does it move in curving pathways? Does it like to jump or skip or tiptoe?

Then retell your story, and as you write, between each sentence or so, pause to look at your answers, and use one of the answers to help you find the next sentence or paragraph.

Or: Single Guiding Principle

Choose the most interesting anatomical idea from the large set we've touched on. Write the idea out as a statement of fact, but in a large-scale astrological style that makes your statement cryptic but potentially relevant to anything. For example, if I was working with the knee, I might say: something has to bend before the whole thing can move forward. Place your statement in front of you and pick a number between 1 and 10.

Retell a borrowed story, and incorporate your statement's wisdom the exact number of times you chose. You might incorporate it in the way the story moves — what comes after what. Or you might incorporate it in a particular voice or image. You might hide the wisdom in the prosody of a single sentence. You might incorporate it in a different way each time.

Passages On Movement And Rest

“Metaphor can be the first that breaks through the dark glass between what is already known and what is still mystery. Through the vehicle of metaphor, we can participate in that movement from what is to what can be. Once in the new land on the other side of the dark glass, we can use the metaphor as a landmark from which to foray into the new world. Eventually the metaphor dissipates in explosion outward from its core into the space of the new landscape. Finally another metaphor coils around the landscape, coalescing into a new vehicle in which we continue the journey.”

—Irene Dowd, from “On Metaphor” in the Fall 1984 edition of *Contact Quarterly*

“[Thought's] sole motive, idea, and function is to produce belief . . . and the soul and meaning of thought, abstracted from the other elements which accompany it, though it may be voluntarily thwarted, can never be made to direct itself toward anything but the production of belief. Thought in action has for its only possible motive the attainment of thought at rest; and whatever does not refer to belief is no part of the thought itself.

And what, then, is a belief? It is the demi-cadence which closes a musical phrase in the symphony of our intellectual life. We have seen that it has just three properties: First, it is something that we are aware of; second, it appeases the irritation of doubt; and third, it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or, say for short, a habit. As it appeases the irritation of doubt, which is the motive for thinking, thought relaxes,

and comes to rest for a moment when belief is reached. But, since belief is a rule for action, the application of which involves further doubt and further thought, at the same time that it is a stopping place, it is also a new starting point for thought. That is why I have permitted myself to call it thought at rest, although thought is essentially an action. The final upshot of thinking is the exercise of volition, and of this thought no longer forms a part; but belief is only a stadium of mental action, an effect upon our nature due to thought, which will influence future thinking.”

—Charles S. Pierce, from “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”

“When we take a general view of the wonderful stream of consciousness, what strikes us first is the different pace of its parts. Like a bird’s life, it seems to be an alternation of flights and perchings. The rhythm of language expresses this, where every thought is expressed in a sentence, and every sentence closed by a period. The resting-places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for an indefinite period of time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest.

Let us call the resting-places the ‘substantive parts,’ and the places of flight the ‘transitive parts,’ of the stream of thought. It then appears that our thinking tends at all times towards some other substantive part than the one from which it has just been dislodged. And we may say that the main use of the transitive parts is to lead us from one substantive conclusion to another.”

—William James, from “The Stream of Thought” in *Principles of Psychology*

Take what’s useful, discard the rest. Enjoy your walk.