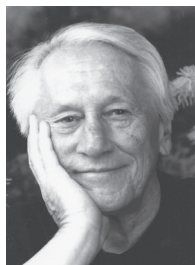


Notes on Touch as Communication

Peter Melchior, July 28, 1931 – May 2, 2005



After a terrible car accident, Peter sought the help of an osteopath to ease his pain until he met Dr. Rolf and began the Ten Series. He felt immediate relief, although it took two years to complete the sessions. He then studied anatomy, physiology, and Esalen massage, and trained with Dr. Rolf in the late 1960s. His life was dedicated to the teachings of Dr. Rolf, and he became one of her first teachers in 1971. He moved to Boulder in 1972 to start a practice and teach for what became the Rolf Institute® where he served on the Board of Directors and faculty. He left the Rolf Institute to join the newly formed Guild for Structural Integration in 1990 where he taught workshops and classes worldwide and served on the Board and faculty.

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The continuous movement of energy through the system results in fluctuations; if they are minor, the system damps them and they do not alter its structural integrity. But if the fluctuations reach a critical size, they “perturb” the system. They increase the number of novel interactions within it. They shake it up. The elements of the old pattern come into contact with each other in new ways and make new connections. The parts reorganize into a new whole. The system escapes into a higher order.

(Ferguson, 1987, p. 164-165)

A great many discussions have been heard and read since Dr. Ida Rolf presented her work to the world about what amount of force is necessary to use in order to successfully produce the results in physical structure which tend to be valued by clients and practitioners of structural integration (SI). Nearly all these discussions, through the years, have remained within a rather simplistic mechanical context, largely, I believe, because of the difficulties encountered when one wishes to speak of the sometimes subtle, nearly always mysterious, interactions on the level of what has been called *bodymind*.

Experience and observation seem to demonstrate that there is nowhere implicit in the requirements of the *process* of structural integration a necessity to “push harder” or to otherwise grunt, strain, or work more, just in order to influence the organism more deeply. Often, in fact, just the reverse seems to be the case—less is more.

Dr. Rolf’s own words on the subject may provide a clue: “Go around the problem: get the system sufficiently resilient so that it is able to change, and

it will change. It doesn’t have to be forced. It’s the forcing that you have to avoid at all costs” (Rolf, 1985, p. 83).

And again:

There is one first rule of Rolfing®: if at first you don’t succeed, get the hell out. Because if at first you don’t succeed, it’s somewhere else. There’s no use in just taking hammer and tongs and trying to pull it apart. That’s not the answer. The whole trick of Rolfing is going around and around and around, and not barging through.

(Rolf, 1985, p. 83)

So we find ourselves up against the necessity to look elsewhere for instruction, to “think in other categories,” as Mr. Gurdjieff would say. I would like to suggest that a true “perturbation” results from introduction into the system of more coherent information, rather than simply adding mechanical energy in ever greater magnitudes; and further, that *following* the breath strikes just the deep chord in the bodymind of the client that is necessary to encourage reorganization of the kind we are seeking.

In fact, I would suggest that if the practitioner of structural integration remains solidly at the level of mechanics and relies solely upon descriptions drawn from this limited field of perception/cognition, there will not often be a perturbation of sufficient magnitude to encourage a permanent reorganization and integration around the new information being introduced into the client’s system. Rather, the strength of the signal will tend to arouse *resistance* to any reorganization suggested, and the practitioner winds up working through artifacts of her/his own

enthusiastic intervention, as well as whatever was there to attract attention in the first place.

Communication through the body is the main theme of the work of structural integration, as well as the principle means by which it is accomplished (Heckler, 1993). We arouse the interest of the client's own organicity (Kurtz, 1990) by clarification and shaping our intention towards the interaction (rather than by creating a more powerful disturbance in the body), so that education may take place.

Ida Rolf used the word education in a quite specific sense in her classes. She referred back to the Latin root, *educare*: "to lead out," in order to make a distinction between this kind of education and the style which simply throws more and more information at the student in the hope that greater skill will eventually result.

We begin with the notion that there exists within each human individual (or, for that matter, in each living organism) an emergent order; then we approach this organizational intelligence residing in our client's bodymind with suggestions for developing an increasing repertoire of options for living. There is no need to struggle in order to change anything.

Everything is already changing.

There is a great variety of ways to visualize what is taking place in the interaction between client and practitioner in structural integration. One person may see structure/function as shape, another imagines skeletal architecture shifting, while another perceives fluidic resonance in the body, and so forth. These images, or forms, are usually chosen by an individual because they work, in some way.

However, in order to assist another person, regardless of any personal metaphor preferred by a practitioner (one's map of the client's reality), communication must be in a form which is understandable to *the client*. For example, if one's style of orientation is largely visual and the client is a person who mostly takes in information through language, no matter how clear or colorful or how elegant the images used may be, if they do not make contact with the client's native intelligence, and speak to it, there is not likely to be any permanent effect on the client's inner world (or on the body, for that matter). Or if the practitioner is of a more tactile persuasion, the touch used must communicate safety and intelligence to the client, and a sense of

providing possibilities for introducing information which was not previously available to the person's awareness. (Not necessarily in the sense of looking at new things, but rather looking at familiar things with new eyes, as some poet has so eloquently expressed the thought.)

We tend to forget, sometimes, that it is the *client* who knows what is going on in his or her own system, rather than some expert on whatever condition is perceived in the system.

If one is not communicating directly with the client's sense of reality . . . it will not matter how much pressure is applied, how precisely a particular structure may be addressed, or how long one hangs out on a spot demanding that it change.

I believe that creative use of imagination is what separates "cook from chef," to use Dr. Rolf's old metaphor. The ability to send one's intention, carefully shaped, moving ahead of the ends of one's fingers, elbow, or what-have-you to contact the living, breathing presence at the core of that person, and to ride the wave of the breath *through* the body, is a major ingredient in an artistic presentation of structural integration. If one is not communicating directly with the client's sense of reality, and following an emergent development of *the client's* choosing, it will not matter how much pressure is applied, how precisely a particular structure may be addressed, or how long one hangs out on a spot demanding that it change.

Perhaps a slightly different metaphor relative to the process of communication may serve to illustrate further the requirements we have been discussing: Imagine you are in Red Square in Moscow, addressing a crowd in English. It is of great importance to you that what you are attempting to say is understood by the people. You sense your message is not getting across. If you simply increase your *volume*, it will not make very much difference to people who do not understand your language. You need to switch to Russian.

A somewhat similar requirement exists in the relationship between practitioner and client, in SI. If your message is not getting through, it would

seem to make good sense to adjust the form of your communication, rather than to merely step up the signal (by pushing harder).

Guided through the Recipe, the practitioner follows a line of emerging *possibility* through the client's body to encourage movement toward new insight, greater awareness, or felt sense of structure/function. One reaches and encourages a greater flow of information toward the center of the client's being. Access to useful ideas on how to proceed is often gained directly through the messages coming from the client's organism. All we need do is listen.

When Ida Rolf was teaching, watching a practitioner working with a client, she would often exclaim, "That's it! Talk to it. Talk to it." She could see that the practitioner had found his or her way to the right place, but that there was another step involved in communication with the tissue there. I believe she meant to convey the sense that contact and comprehension of what is being contacted are primary aspects of communication, and that just pushing on tissue would not get one very far toward the goal of integration, particularly if one was insisting upon reality matching one's own mechanical image of a human organism. She pointed to Korybski's exhortation, often: "The map is not the territory" (1958). In order to communicate usefully with a client, it becomes necessary to adjust one's map to match the territory, not the other way around.

Some recent work in the fields of physics and biology provide a fascinating look into a world of new possibilities for communication across the boundaries assumed to exist between individuals. At first, the notion of intention resulting in actual effects in physical structure may seem a bit far-fetched. However, when one considers the following, it may begin to show itself in a better light:

Because all such things are aspects of the holomovement, he (Bohm) feels that it has no meaning to speak of consciousness and matter as interacting. In a sense, the observer is the observed. The observer is also the measuring device, the experimental results, the laboratory, and the breeze that blows outside the laboratory.

In fact, Bohm believes that consciousness is a more subtle form of matter, and the basis for any relationship between the two lies not in our own level of reality, but deep in the implicate order. Consciousness is present in various degrees of enfoldment and unfoldment in all matter, which

is perhaps why plasmas possess some of the traits of living things. As Bohm puts it, "The ability of form to be active is the most characteristic feature of mind, and we have something that is mind-like already with the electron."

(Talbot, 1992, p. 50)

Explorations in the fields of chaos theory and complexity may lead to some exciting developments for everyone in the field of somatics. (It should also be said that these ideas may be dangerous to one's sense of complacency. Since this was written, Dr. James Oschman has presented me with the idea that in looking towards these new notions from physics to elucidate biological processes, we may be going too far. It's certainly worth considering.)

In closing, let us consider the following notion from *The Holographic Universe*, composed from a consideration of the work of David Bohm and Karl Pribram, taken together: "Our brains mathematically construct objective reality by interpreting frequencies that are ultimately projections from another dimension, a deeper order of existence that is beyond both space and time. The brain is a hologram enfolded in a holographic universe" (Talbot, 1992, p. 54).

Resources

Complexity is the emerging science at the edge of order and chaos. For an excellent journey through the areas of chaos and complexity, I suggest *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* by M. Mitchell Waldrop (Simon & Schuster, 1992) and *Chaos: Making a New Science* by James Gleick (Viking, 1987).

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