

Articulated Perception, Articulated Structure: Building the Sense of Other in the Context of Structural Integration

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Fascial restriction is linked to perceptual fixation. Structural Integration (SI) addresses this link because SI is both a fascial and perceptual modality. SI addresses physical structure, and at the same time addresses perceptual habit. The combination empowers clients to regain improved function. What kind of perceptual change are we looking for? We wish to see perceptual changes in the preparation to move. When preparation changes, movement can normalize. One way to model perceptive change is called, 'building the sense of other.' Hubert Godard inspires this approach.

Structural Integration and Normal Movement

Ida Rolf taught a ten step protocol for, "changing the myofascia and bringing it toward the normal, [so that] the practitioner of Structural Integration *evokes a more normal* (in our sense of the word) *movement*." (Italics added.) Rolf said many things about changing fascia and bringing bodies into greater order and alignment. In the SI field we hear a lot of about fascia and alignment. What then follows from an inquiry into normal movement?

Movement is the proof positive of effective Structural Integration. Integrated movement can't be posed or concocted. Posing reduces flow and articulation. When we see more integrated movement we are seeing self-organizational intelligence.

Perception is a Movement

What do we mean by movement? Movement includes all the ways our body parts move and locomote. It also includes the movement of perception. Although not as obvious, SI practitioners track the way a client organizes their perception. For example, we notice the shape and

size of a person's kinesphere. Also, we notice the degree of sensory awareness in different parts of the body.

Object Relations

We also notice our clients' perceptual movement by observing what could be called their object relations. The term object relations is borrowed loosely from psychology—specifically psychoanalytic psychology. Object relations, as we are using the term, relegates relationship with mother, father, bottle, or tricycle, into one category—object. It is as though, from the point of view of learning to function in the world, animate and in-animate objects are equal. Simplifying the world into one inhabited by objects of different sorts, turns out to be a useful way to make a link between movement/perception, and the relational politic of life. It is also links the notion of con-fused fascia—what Rolf emphasized—and the notion of con-fused relational issues, the ones that challenge us from birth on.

The two confusions are not separate: stuck fascia that glues our muscles together, that restricts our movement, is partly the result of stuck and confused relations with objects in our world.

How is this so? How does Structural Integration address object relations?

Structural Integration's Explicit and Implicit Structures

To answer that question we look at the relationship of four kinds of structure: perception, meaning, coordination, and physical structure. We can describe our movement as determined by four ways we habitually function. Structural Integration implicitly sets out to change all four parts of our habitual tendencies. SI training focuses on

physical structure: anatomy, fascial planes, location, timing, and amplitude of touch—the nuts and bolts of becoming a structural body worker. To one degree or another, SI training addresses the other three structures, though not as clearly documented in Rolf's writings. SI, as taught by Rolf, addressed physical structure explicitly and addressed perception, meaning and coordination implicitly.

The implicit aspects of SI show up in a number of techniques derived from Rolf's teaching. These techniques include: 'tracking,' in which the practitioner does guiding touch while the client moves in gravity; guided imagery, in which the practitioner invites the client to actively imagine locations in their body or the space around them to initiate movement; positioning, in which the body is supported in movement, following Rolf's dictum to, "put it where it belongs and ask for movement;" integrative homework, in which the practitioner invites the client to imagine a situation in his life in which a newly discovered way of moving could be integrated. SI practitioners have many tools for addressing perception, meaning, and coordination.

In addition, deep slow pressure in fascia is itself a perceptual intervention as much as it is a release of physical restriction. Slow deep pressure in fascia reminds the body of its articulations. The body has an internal map of itself and it's the basis for coordinative decisions. When the map is better (more differentiated), the movement choices are more nuanced, more articulated. Rolf's fascial work speaks to the internalized body map.

Back to the initial question: how are stuck fascia and confused object relations linked? We must look more closely at how perception is at the heart of evoking more normal movement.

Preparation to Move

One way to look at the perceptual basis of movement is to notice that the body prepares itself in anticipation of any movement. Preparation is largely automatic and quick. Preparation can be observed but usually isn't. For example, before I raise my arm, my body will prepare for the change in balance by tensing muscles in my ankle or my trunk. Before standing up, I make a relationship with the floor and the space into which I will move—out of those relationships will come the body's strategy for standing.

Slowing down the beginning of a movement, experimenting with perception and orientation reveals a universe of activity that goes on in every waking moment, but which typically eludes our awareness.

Preparation to movement, what Godard has

termed 'pre-movement,' is where we can discover something about our object relations. In pre-movement we discover what kind of 'other' lives in our perceived world.

Me and Other

The term 'other' means many things. Here, other means that which doesn't belong to the image of me, my personal identity or the extended sense of me. My image of myself includes the story of my life and all that I reflexively defend, protect, or criticize because it feels like a part of me.

As an example, when I am introduced to an unfamiliar object, a person or a place or thing, there is often the greatest opportunity to be struck by the new object, to be struck by its novelty, to feel its novelty touch me. I don't know it and I must, at least briefly, organize a new perception based on sight, sound, smell, and touch.

After some period of familiarization, a second, or minutes, or hours, or days, the object starts to become 'known.' I know it, and it resides in my image of the world, which, since it is a known image, is part of the sense of me.

When an object is new and can strike me, can truly touch me in some way, my movement begins with the greatest degree of sensory impression. When the object becomes familiar it becomes a part of my known world. Then, my movement begins with remembered image of the object and my pre-movement is informed by an image rather than fresh sensory impression.

Story of Other versus Sense of Other

Much of what we think of as other is really an image or a 'story' about other. Images reside in stories about our world and what inhabits it.

Why do we turn other into image or story? This question provokes observation of a process that lives in us every day. To observe it in the present, we first examine our learning experiences, especially early ones in which we learned basic skills necessary for showing up in our social world.

Learning to Master Situations

What happens when we learn to throw a ball or hold a pencil for the first time? In the example of the pencil, if I am the one who is little and someone else is older and knows how to use a pencil, I might watch them. It might look like fun to make those lines, drawing lines or lines of letters and words. Perhaps, I will have opportunity to begin to play with the pencil and paper on my own, at my own pace and in proximity to the quiet observation of an elder.

Or perhaps my elder will be eager to teach

me. Even the kindest teacher may instruct me to "be sure to hold on to the pencil," or "keep the pencil on the paper," or some other cautionary words to assist me in gaining skill quickly. In the moment in which I try the new task, what is my predisposition? It depends on my mood, my level of arousal, and my previous experiences with crawling, toilet training, putting on clothes, or petting a dog or cat. In short, there are many factors that lead to my predisposition to the first moment of holding, and attempting to use, a pencil.

We assert, though, that we want to succeed! We want to do well and we want to be sure to hold the pencil rather than dropping it, or stay on the paper rather than skidding off on to the table. (Or we may be contrary. That story has similar consequences.) In most cultures, the learning process involves mistake-avoidance. We don't mean to imply that we can avoid this mistake-avoidance, in our teaching and child rearing. We just say it happens. And we will offer some suggestions for remedy.

I hold the pencil with an intention to make sure it doesn't slip out of my grip. I focus my will to make sure it stays in my hand. If it falls out anyway, I try extra hard next time. If it stays in my hand, I add this coordinative prototype to my repertoire of learned skills. And that learned skill doesn't change. After all, it worked. My conscious mind is averse to changing it. My unconscious mind is averse to changing it. If it works, why change it? At a deep level, the body needs dependable sub-routines so they function dependably when I can't think quickly enough to do so. They need to be automatic. It's efficient.

How do these early learning experiences show up in adult movement patterns? We observe that people are often uncomfortable when they try to learn a new movement. It's scary to be a beginner at any new physical task. It can even be overwhelming. People practice failure avoidance through recruitment of extra muscles to stabilize. What does that look like? We tend to describe it as bound flow, or restricted flow, co-contraction, or effortful.

What does our learned image have to do with this? Our learned sub-routines were composed during moments in which we practiced mistake-avoidance or, as Hubert Godard has put it, we 'mastered the situation.' When we master a situation we turn the situation into an image. We reinforce that image each time we do the movement, or think about doing the movement. When we remember a mastered movement, we might feel reassurance or we might feel self-doubt. It doesn't matter. We reinforce the image.

Mastering the Image of Other

When we touch the object or objects associated with a situation that has been mastered, we touch an image. The object is experienced as an image. We don't have to sense the object itself because we know it. It's part of the stored knowledge that represents our known world.

As we stated in the beginning, pencils, and persons are all objects in terms of movement. We grasp the pencil in the same way we grasp the outcome of a social relationship. We stabilize against falling down in parallel to the ways we stabilize against verbal attack or attempt to assert ourselves with a partner.

We turn other into an image; we turn other into something I hold as part of the image of myself because mastery is about gaining control of a threatening world. A known image, even if it arouses strong emotion or pain, is preferable to the discomfort associated with the unknown.

People live their lives mostly mastering the situation. Each time that we learn a new movement under circumstances of mistake avoidance, we are likely either repeating or inventing new forms of mastered coordination. When one teaches movement this is one of the dangers.

Fascia Tells the Mastering Story

What happens to the fascia as a result of mistake avoidance? As practitioners of Structural Integration we are used to palpating the results of mastered coordination. In the hand, forearm, arm and shoulder we will feel the bony articulations as not articulated. The fascia has conjoined bony parts reflecting movement in which a person has been fused to the objects of his environment.

In the belly wall, we are used to feeling how fascia has reinforced patterns of defense against anticipation of any number of possible failures including instability of the spine.

In the feet and lower leg, leg and pelvis, we feel how fascia reinforces lines of stabilization to protect against falling down.

Fascia reveals a pattern of lost articulation between self and object. Structure reflects concentricity of perception.

How do we unlock this predicament? How do we 'un-master' the movements that confront us? We can count on some happy accidents of perceptive and coordinative change that accompany fascial differentiation, the classic work of Structural Integration. It is a marvelously helpful tool in recovery of flow and normal movement.

Troubleshooting Faulty Coordination

If failures of coordination persist, despite

competent fascial work, we use other tools to help 'un-master' the situation. This is especially so where you see a client moving better but notice that their symptoms persist. Shoulder pain, hand and arm pain, low back and pelvic pain, knee problems, foot problems—all these issues may not go away by differentiating fascia, and balancing ligaments. The faulty body schema has been addressed—but not the body image.

Movement work can address body image, especially as it accompanies the fascial work. Some practitioners will also be drawn to the underlying emotional content of the movement, or to addressing a person's shock and trauma. Others might address organ mobility or motility. Still others might hold space for biodynamic change, or movement improvisation work such as Continuum.

Our proposed thesis agrees with all of these options.

We further propose that faulty stabilization requires specific rehabilitation in coordination. Such rehabilitation must address pre-movement and in so doing address the issue of object relations.

If one invites the client to actively participate in rehabilitating their coordination, educating them about building a sense of other helps unglue the patterns of mastery. Ungluing mastery is a rebuilding of sensory impression which builds healthy coordination.

Articulation Means Separation—Separation for Successful Coordination

We want to feel the appropriate articulations, the separations of parts. Parts are parts because they improve the nuance of function, until they don't. Parts start to feel and function as fused as articulation is lost at the perceptive level.

Articulating the Shoulder Girdle and Upper Limb

Our hand, arm, and shoulder articulations provide a good way to start. We test a base line, pulling on the client's arm to see what articulates. Does the arm and shoulder differentiate at all its joints or does it come as a block and pull the spine with it?

We ask the client to notice weight in the spine. We hold the hand of the client with our two hands. We show anatomical structure with a skeletal model. We invite the client to bring his or her attention to the space between the carpal bones and the radius. We bring our attention to this space as well and we offer an appropriate level of sustained traction. We notice the shift in the articulation as the client tunes in to the space. The

hand is being asked to join me, the practitioner, while the rest of the arm and shoulder stay with the client, with the weight orientation of the spine. The client is building a sense of other by articulating the space between us at the wrist.

Next, we ask for attention in the interosseous space, between radius and ulna. Can the client imagine that space and allow the radius to come with me the practitioner while the ulna and everything proximal rests with the client? This is followed by articulation of the ulna with the humerus and then the humerus with the glenoid fossa of the scapula. Finally, the client is asked to notice the articulation of the scapula with the rib cage or the clavicle with the manubrium.

Each step of the exercise builds a perception of separation. At the end the practitioner tests for articulation in the whole chain with gentle traction. Do the bones feel as though they separate and express freedom from other? The articulations may strike the client in a very new way. The hand may be able to be with the other and the spine and core may feel comfortably at rest. The hand can now be touched by the other, can express a reach toward or press against other, freely. Expression is liberated by received impression, impression of other.

Building the Sense of Other

What is the other? Other can be the floor, or the table, or a ball, stick, or any perceived object. It can be the practitioner or some part of the practitioner's body. Other can also be the client's body or body process. In each example, the client learns to sustain sensory impression of the other. Sustained sensory impression is a skill that can be learned.

As practitioners, we wish to observe the moment to moment success or failure of sense impression. If we can observe it, we can reinforce success even if the client is unsure. Moment to moment sense impression can be observed during movement in which the client holds or presses against something with their hands or feet.

To observe another's sensory impression is empathic and kinesthetic in nature and might best be described as "imagining" the perceptual field of the other. Our capacity to see is not infallible. We never really know the other's experience. Practitioner curiosity goes a long way toward supporting the client's learning process.

Wall as Other

We use the example of pushing with one foot against a wall. This is done most conveniently with the wall at the end of the bodywork table. We wish to see the client build and sustain a sensory

experience of the wall. We want her to allow the wall to touch her foot before she presses against the wall. We might have to offer some encouragement through touch of our hand, or by slowing down our instructions. We might use words that ask the client to notice texture, or temperature, or density of what touches her foot. We will likely repeat this process many times, until she feels the permission and urgency to begin the movement this way, to take the time to refresh the sensory impression before pressing with the foot.

What does success look like? We see a reduction in the tonus of antagonists to the movement, a softening of the mastery muscles before the movement starts. With reduced use of stabilizer muscles, with movement orchestrated in the non-cortical 'movement brain,' from sense impression, we see a renaissance of articulation, between bony parts and between our body and the object.

Clients can be encouraged to experiment. They might alternate sense impression before they press with skipping sense impression. Can they feel the difference? Can they feel a lowering of effort, an increase of flow and efficacy? A bit of persistence and insistence in early sessions paves the way for success in later ones.

Spinal Stabilization and Building the Other

A hallmark of success will be improvement in stabilization of the spine. When the client is side-lying or supine, a press of one or both feet can be coupled with movement of the spine into reduced or increased lordosis. If the client finds a rich and sustained level of sensory impression, the movement of the spine is easy and fluid. With no impression, the movement of the spine is effortful and will look 'stabilized by effort.' We then see loss of articulation in the client's bony joints and between the client and his world.

How does this fulfill the idea of other? The default movement will start with an image of the movement and an image of the object, in this case the wall. The default movement starts typically with the look of effort. The sense of other is the feeling that comes as the sensory information is sought and taken in. This is the skill building. We learn to open to sensory impression and feel it as new, as interesting, as affecting us. We start to build a greater capacity to dwell in successive moments of being touched. We do this by trial and error, and with coaching from someone who empathizes with our perceptual process.

Building the sense of other can, in an instant, dispel the story of other. Coordination changes as soon as sense impression opens. The image of other is replaced by the immediacy of

contact.

Objects as Other

In sessions or classes, we use many objects as 'other.' An example is the wooden stick. I can hold a stick in my hand (something about 1 3/8" x 30") to reach or, to bend over, I can hold it in both hands. I start by building the sense of stick as other. I take in the stick's weight, its texture, its shape. How do I grasp the stick? Do I grasp with interest and open to what the stick is saying to my hand, or in a way that connotes mastery?

I can imbue the stick with qualities that come from my imagination. Imagination speaks to sense impression.

What if I imagine the stick is heavy? Can I amplify my experience of its weight? Our sensory brain is very capable of this sort of invention. Sensation and imagination are not separate. When I imagine a heavy stick, my body will react as though it is heavy. I can allow the weight to pull on my wrists, my arms, my shoulders, and allow the hand to spine sequence to articulate.

Then I can shift my imagined sense of the stick to one of buoyancy. Can I feel the imagined buoyant stick taking my hands, arms and shoulders above my head? Can I imagine the stick so buoyant that my body feels like it is hanging from it?

This is the territory of building the other. It is a skill that feeds itself and improves with improvisation. When I am freshly surprised by the sensory or imagined experience of the other, I am more likely to stay interested. As fresh impression releases movement into core stability and articulated flow, the value of the perception is reinforced.

Meeting the Other

Pressing my hand against another person's hand, I have the opportunity to meet another in a potent dynamic. I allow the skin of my hand to open to the impression of the other hand. I sense the other hand's temperature, its moisture, its texture, and I allow the impression to touch me. As I take it in, I will sense how the outer muscles of the shoulder relax. In their place, I feel strength that comes without effort. I am not thinking about my serratus anterior as I do it, the serratus anterior muscles are active and relieve the shoulder of its need for mastery. I may feel that the carpal bones, the radius, ulna, humerus, and scapula are articulated, and un-fused.

Picture this event of two people meeting. In this imagined meeting, both people receive sense impression from the ground, as other. Both people notice the space surrounding their bodies as other, the skin of the other's hand as other—this kind of

meeting gives the impression of no need for defense or mastery. Instead of mastery, both persons feel the power of other to liberate them from the need for image. Now both observe the other person with curiosity, possibly with wonder. They do so with a sense of other as other, their own bodies as other, and world as other.

A body that is relieved of the burden of defense, or need to arouse effort, or mastery, feels emptied out, spacious. The Chinese Buddhists and Taoists spoke of this emptiness as a blessed state. This ancient metaphor is appropriate to finding competent coordination. A body that competently stabilizes through sensory contact with other expresses a pleasant quality of emptiness. Core is alive but not from thinking about core. Core muscles activate in response to impression of the other. One doesn't need to 'do' the activating.

Picture the two persons who meet with rich senses of other received in each person's hands, feet, and skin. The pictured meeting involves a contra-lateral stance, with hand forward and foot behind on one side. There is strength in the meeting but without effort. Strength shows as hand presses against hand and foot presses against ground. Each person's head notices space above, notices space omni-directionally. The eyes rest in non-cortical gaze that regards the space all around, including the space behind the opposite person. Robust sense of other allows the meeting be easy, restful, while at the same time immediate and exciting. The meeting can be sustained and without fatigue.

The two persons then move apart and begin to walk. They have amplified the sense of other in several dimensions and, as they walk, continue to amplify their sense of other.

As they walk, we likely observe flow of contra-lateral walk. Each person's girdles are free from their axis, and hands and feet are engaged with the environment and articulated.

Articulated Relations in the World

When we practice movement that begins with appropriate pre-movement, that begins with sense impression, and when we experience 'other' as a perception that liberates, we may begin to notice what it means to sense intelligent relationship. Sense impression of other liberates us from the habit of mastery. Overwhelm due to a difficult conversation, overwhelm due to transference and projection, all provoke the impulse to master the situation. In mastery, there is fusing with object. Our psychological defenses are congruent with our physical defenses. Confused fascia results from mastery and helps provoke mastery. Fascia that is restricted reduces our

internal sense of articulation and this amplifies the tendency to lose articulation in relationship.

What is appropriate relationship? It is a koan for all time, isn't it? And yet orientation to the 'other' of our environment, to Earth and sky, to sense impression in the extremities; this allows the body to feel, at least for moments at a time, empty. Empty, in this context, means free of self concern and effort. An empty sense of self can derive from the potent sense of other. As a thought this is counter-intuitive. To do it may reveal something different than we think.

When the sense of other is alive and the sense of self, of local body, is relatively empty, the problems of relationship may not appear so insurmountable. We defend ourselves as an impulse to master what we remember to be overwhelming. In such a state we do not hear the other, and we do not see the other. Two people not hearing each other constitute a conflict. At any point, one person who reveals ability to empathically hear the other can provoke a moment of great relief for both parties. With a small respite from conflict, relationship has the opportunity to be reborn, over and over.

No formula or guarantee follows from this thesis. One must find what holds true in each situation. Structural integration isn't about reliable formulae or guarantees. The model we describe simply says that perceptual habit leads to coordinative and physical tendencies which in turn mirror relational psychology. The capacity to work this way is grounded in perceptive skills that serve healthy body movement. Building the sense of other liberates coordination and fascia from confusion. In the same manner it provides tools for relational articulation. Structural integration functions as an integrative model for object relations.

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