

# Rolf Movement®

## Faculty Perspectives

### *Differentiating Categories of Embodiment: An Educational Rationale for Rolf Movement Integration within Rolfing® SI*

**By Kevin Frank, Certified Advanced Rolfer™, Rolf Movement Instructor**

Embodiment is intrinsic to structural integration (SI). SI depends on a practitioner's learned capacity to experience, demonstrate, speak about, and work from a personal embodiment of Dr. Rolf's work. A practitioner learns to empathically "see" another person's body process; but we learn to see primarily through what we know in our own body – embodiment. Seeing depends on one's own differentiated body awareness. Our awareness becomes differentiated as our body awakens to more and more of its

full range of inherent capacity to move, sense, and meet challenge. Embodiment is a lifelong inquiry into inherent body movement intelligence.

Embodiment, for purposes of SI, means a set of developed skills of awareness and coordination: skills for conscious awareness of perceived phenomena and, at the same time, acquired non-conscious capacities to perceive and respond skillfully. What kinds of skills are involved? SI training is built around specific skills of body learning that were synthesized and assembled by

Rolf as a particular gestalt. Rolf defined SI by certain hallmarks of function – these hallmarks are part of what offers contrast to other forms of body and psychological therapy. In any tradition though, it is through depth of embodiment that we contact the limitless nature of somatic inquiry. Historically, the Rolf Movement faculty has been the group at the Rolf Institute® most focused on curricula that support skills of embodiment aside from fascial mobilization.

## Keen's Discussion of Embodiment

Rolf Movement training is becoming better documented and defined; the time is ripe for more precise descriptions of this elusive term, “embodiment.” Roling SI and Rolf Movement Instructor Lael Keen has contributed significantly to this task. Keen offers eight components of embodiment intrinsic to Roling SI in her 2009 article on the subject.<sup>1</sup> She highlights the following qualities: presence; palintonicity; contralateral movement; responsiveness, lightness, and fluidity; dynamic balance; grace; and optimal relationship with gravity. Keen's article elaborates on each quality to illustrate what we aim to evoke in SI.

Keen's hallmarks of function reflect decades of evolution in the SI field and, at the same time, ring true to Rolf's original vision. In terms of Rolf Movement education, a next step is to ask the question: how do we categorize embodiment? How do we sort the dimensions of embodiment that inhabit the lessons we teach? How do we link them to physiology?

The purpose of this article is to differentiate underpinnings to integrated function in gravity so we may further ground the abstraction “embodiment.” When we categorize forms of embodiment, we offer students specificity to their learning process – what skills are explicit to their development and what leads to depth in the work. We make the process less mysterious. What we cannot do is make the process quick and easy. By any name, embodiment takes practice.

## Embodiment Seen in Terms of Brain Maps of Body Function

Physiologically, embodiment, both conscious and non-conscious, is conveniently linked to a scientific model:

differentiated sensory and motor maps in the brain. Greater embodiment means more differentiation in the brain's maps of sensory and motor processes. Maps in the brain are not literally pictorial maps in the way we think of, say, road maps. “Brain maps” is a neuroscience term for the brain's organization of learned coordinative and perceptual patterns, like musical scripts that the brain can play. These routines, once learned and practiced, are called upon for whatever purpose the brain/body is asked to play. Whenever the terms “map” or “maps” are used in this article, it is the sensory and motor brain maps that are being referred to.

While brain maps are not pictorial maps, the metaphor helps explain the differentiation of these terms. A paper road map that covers an entire continent can't show the smaller, back roads. If we make the map huge, though, we magnify the scale. Our map of the continent could become the size of a soccer field and those tiny little roads would show up and be easy to read. The more tiny roads and hamlets on the map, the more it has been *differentiated*. A large thing is broken down into fine distinctions between one thing (location) and another. In the brain, the more that tiny things are distinct and defined and the more connections between points, the more differentiated the sensory and motor maps are, and the more refined and skillful the movement – a hallmark of SI.

Maps exist mostly below the level of conscious awareness. However, we witness our mapping when we feel the quality of our body movements and how we respond to circumstance. We feel the “movement brain” make choices faster than we can think about doing so, and more skillfully than we can control with thought. When you tie your shoes or flip a pancake, there are hosts of maps operating automatically. Maps that allow shoe tying or pancake flipping are fundamentally similar to maps that cause us to stand upright in gravity or walk down the street. Maps offer a way to explain the power of SI.

To build new maps, maps that lead to SI, we can describe categories of learning: new maps and improved maps represent learning. This type of learning is embodiment.

Models, of course, are not the thing itself. So it is with models of sensory function and motor control. The list below artificially

divides embodiment into categories of body process that we can think about separately. It is an approximation. The body doesn't work in divided categories, but we think and talk this way. The list assists us in organizing our thinking about different parts of a course or training. The list categorizes parts of the learning process so students have another overview of what they are learning; it's a chance to notice which body processes are skillfully embodied and which ones are less so.

## Seven Categories of Embodiment

Why seven categories? There is nothing magic about this number. It is a starting point from which we may consider additional categories in the future. This list attempts to include important perceptual and coordinative processes for which SI has a relevant contribution. The descriptions are necessarily brief. The larger story behind each category of embodiment constitutes the content of other articles, as well as courses taught as part of the Rolf Movement certification program. The overlapping nature of these components and their natural interrelationship are left for future discussions.

We begin at the body process that is the foundation for consciousness and movement organization – orientation.

1. **Orientation Embodiment:** Orientation is, for mammals (including people), a biological imperative that begins with orientation to up and down. “Orientation embodiment” means a capacity to draw on orientation as a resource for meeting demand. To be clear: in order to read and think about the words in front of you right now, you are necessarily oriented. It's automatic. It functions in the background for every minimally functional person. Part of embodiment, though, involves a deliberate and conscious awareness of the orientation process: for example, we can learn to be aware of our orientation to weight, and orientation to space and distance. We can learn to perceive a spectrum of ways for arousing orientation response to establish security at a sensorimotor level. We return over and over to gravity orientation, experienced as the foundation for all other forms of orientation. Orientation embodiment includes a capacity to feel differentiation between orientation to



“where” and orientation to “what” – that is, between orientation that locates us at a sensorimotor level versus orientation that lives in thought. Understanding of the relationship between where and what is fundamental to the SI process.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Body Perceptive Processes:*

2. **Interoceptive Embodiment:** What is interoception? Clare Fowler, in the journal *Brain*, states, “As originally defined interoception encompassed just visceral sensations but now the term is used to include the physiological condition of the entire body and the ability of visceral afferent information to reach [conscious] awareness and affect behaviour, either directly or indirectly. The system of interoception as a whole constitutes “the material me” and relates to how we perceive feelings from our bodies that determine our mood, sense of well-being and emotions.”<sup>3</sup> This comment is apt. Interoception is a concept that has evolved and now provides structural integrators with a way to describe how felt sense affects function and posture. It’s a definable skill: to differentiate interoceptive information and integrate it into life. Interoception embodiment includes capacity to find a sense of the internal volume and density in the body and to arouse and enhance an experience of body volume. It includes a capacity to sense and enhance the experience of body containment with a feeling of what Hubert Godard calls “body envelope,” which he links to Jacques Lacan’s first (real) body image.<sup>4</sup> Interoceptive embodiment includes a capacity to interpret conscious interoceptive awareness as felt sense, and link it to emotion, resource, and security. Interoception includes the manner in which we perceive and interpret pain. As in the case of other forms of body information, and as the above quote points out, non-conscious interoceptive signals abound. In SI, it is the portions of these types of signals that we notice consciously that are the most relevant for learning. Non-conscious processes develop in response to what we learn consciously.

3. **Proprioceptive Embodiment:** Proprioception, like interoception, has shifted in definition over the past decades, but a modern working definition includes how the body consciously differentiates shifts in body position,

shape, movement, and relationship to gravity through stretch receptors and vestibular function. Healthy proprioceptive embodiment means that proprioception is given a chance to do its job; meaning that proprioception is not eclipsed by image-based efforts – images of performance or learned patterns of fear and compensation. Conscious proprioception can be a way of restoring body intelligence so efforts and images can release. Proprioceptive embodiment education includes the fascial mobilization component of SI as well as instruction in experiential anatomy, and other means that provoke or refresh a differentiated experience of the physical body.

4. **Exteroceptive Embodiment:** Exteroception concerns one’s position in gravity and space like proprioception, but references the world “outside” the body boundary, using the eyes, ears, and skin. Exteroceptive embodiment includes a capacity to sense the world as a differentiated moving event – an event that I reach to touch with my being, and (when coupled with orientation to weight) is an event that holds me and touches my being. Exteroception is another source of basic body security. It is prominent when we observe the use of the eyes. Eyes can integrate with proprioception or can interrupt proprioception; this issue is central to SI. Palintonicity can be viewed as proprioceptive awareness of weight or the down direction, coupled with exteroceptive awareness of space or up direction.

#### *Body Coordinative Processes:*

5. **Agency Body/Coordination Embodiment:** As human beings there is a being aspect and a doing aspect. “Agency body”<sup>5,6</sup> refers to the embodiment of functional (and optimal) coordination to meet physical or psychological demand of the moment. In SI the term helps clarify the idea that integration means helping people be effective in life. Agency also means in the SI aesthetic that we might not even feel like the doer but rather we can witness as effective doing happens. “Stabilization embodiment” is a specific embodiment that falls within the agency-body category. Stabilization is interwoven with all other aspects of posture in the SI process. Stabilization embodiment, when named, helps to

define an essential quality that underlies hallmarks of integrated function: stabilization of the spine for hip flexion is one example; another is freedom of the axis from the girdles – many of the hallmarks of our work are examples of appropriate stabilization. Stabilization embodiment means the capacity to draw on all forms of embodiment to meet the broad spectrum of demands thrown at us with and without warning – how we meet the demands of the moment. In SI the capacity to meet demand means one can feel the body lengthen and find spaciousness rather than contract as one meets demand. It is a capacity to respond with primary stabilizer muscles before secondary, and secondary before tertiary, as demand escalates; also included is the capacity to perform action with reduced effort.

6. **Levels of Abstraction Embodiment:** This is the capacity to navigate skillfully between thought and sensation, and skill to navigate toward lesser or greater degrees of abstraction in language and self awareness. Rolf’s work was influenced by Alfred Korzybski and his theory of general semantics,<sup>7</sup> a view that sees language use as a common limiter for all dimensions of human experience. Derived from Korzybski is the work of J. Samuel Bois who builds on Korzybski’s thesis and presents a more accessible story about how our use of language and thought structures experience so fundamentally as to render human beings captive to the unexamined use of language. In his book *The Art of Awareness*, Bois shows us how we can learn to navigate between degrees of abstracted experience, with pure sensory awareness being the least abstracted “knowing” we can identify.<sup>8</sup> For SI a fundamental issue is how language and thought patterns reinforce faulty motor control. Rolf Movement makes the case that when students gain basic skill in distinguishing sensory information from inference about sensation, other aspects of embodiment are easier to learn. Coupled with direct experience of sense perception, it’s helpful for students to learn to name sensation, to deepen an experience with words, and, at the same time, not lose direct observation. Peter Levine’s Somatic Experiencing® training works similarly but focuses on the treatment of shock/trauma. SI is facilitated through practice in shifting between words of

# NOSE AND MOUTH CONSIDERATIONS

low abstraction and words that are more loaded with meaning, inferential and/or abstracted from primary experience. With practice, sensory experience is more easily observed in oneself and others, which, in turn, makes it easier to teach embodiment to clients and students.

7. **Autonomic Embodiment:** Autonomic nervous system activity gets studied medically and academically; in SI one learns to discern the cycles of sympathetic and parasympathetic arousal in one's own body. One learns to feel how these "involuntary" bodily responses are, in fact, like posture, plastic and susceptible to choices in mindfulness, movement, and expression. SI includes an embodiment of the capacity to regulate based on learned ability to notice changes of autonomic state in oneself and others and to have practiced ability to meet each of those states with resource and spacious, timeless presence.

## Further Notes on Mapping

The body, the sensorimotor brain of the body, cannot, and does not, think of itself as a body. That is an idea that we imagine; it is a cognitive idea rather than a physiological fact. The idea of a body is an abstraction. To the extent that the body "thinks," functions at a physiological level, it does

so in reference to the perceived potential for movement. The brain has evolved as a tool for predicting and responding to movement. The mission of the brain is to map the space in which action can occur and action involves the body and the space available to the body equally and without preference. In other words the body and its surrounding space are all the territory, the matrix for action, and inasmuch, the brain maps the "action space."<sup>9</sup> SI is a field engaged in a multidimensional approach to mapping the action space – the dimensions of body, both conscious and unconscious, as they apply to all actions of perception, gesture, body movement, stabilization, regulation. SI is the territory of introducing the various dimensions of embodiment in a titrated manner for lasting improvement of human potential.

## Endnotes

1. Keen, Lael Katherine, "Embodiment and Grace." *Structural Integration: The Journal of the Rolf Institute*, December 2009, pg. 25.
2. Frank, Kevin, "Body as a Movement System". *Structural Integration: The Journal of the Rolf Institute*, June 2008.
3. Fowler, Clare J., "Visceral Sensory Neuroscience: Interoception." *Brain* (2003) Vol. 126 (Issue 6), pp. 1505-1506. Available online at <http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/content/126/6/1505>.

4. Author's notes from a class lecture by Hubert Godard. Godard cites the work of French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, author of *Le Moi-peau* (Paris: Dunod, 1985), as an influence that led to his use of the term.

5. Godard has taken up the usage of "agency body" as it has become common in neuroscience work.

6. Schwabe, L., and O. Blanke, "Cognitive neuroscience of ownership and agency." In *Consciousness and Cognition*, Volume 16, Issue 3, September 2007, pp. 661-666.

7. Korzybski, Alfred, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*. Lakeville, CT: The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co., 1948.

8. Bois, J. Samuel, *The Art of Awareness*. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1978.

9. Godard drew most directly on Rizzolatti as inspiration [G. Rizzolatti and C. Sinigaglia, *So quel che fai* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2006)] to bring this term into usage, derived from Rizzolatti's phrase *spazio per l'azione*. The idea derives also from Poincaré [see J.I. Poincaré, *The Value of Science* (New York: Dover Publications, 1905/1958)].