

helping the client make a permanent change is as simple as sinking one's elbow into a recalcitrant structure to help restore fluidity and unstick the fascial layers. Sometimes, however, the root of the problem lies in other, not so immediately evident, layers of the being. I have attempted in this article to elucidate some of these layers and make a clear and concrete connection between structure, function, and orientation.

For readers who wish to study more on these subjects, I refer them to Levine's two books, *Waking the Tiger* and *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*; Porges's book *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-regulation*, as well as the website www.resourcesinmovement.com, which has many articles written by Frank, Caryn McHose, and Aline Newton about Godard's Tonic Function theory. Lastly, I have written a few articles myself, which integrate the above theories in different ways, and these articles are available through the Ida P. Rolf Library of Structural Integration (<http://pedroprado.com.br>).

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"The Map Is Not the Territory" – "The Word Is Not the Thing"¹

Exploring the Use of Language in the Art of Rolfing® Structural Integration

By Carol A Agneessens, MS, Rolfing® and Rolf Movement® Instructor

Author's Note: The following is based on the transcript of a lecture I gave in 2008 on the use of language in Rolfing Structural Integration (SI) sessions.²

Korzybski and General Semantics

"The map is not the territory." Alfred Korzybski's famous words were quoted frequently during my early trainings at the Rolf Institute® beginning in 1981. Korzybski was a Polish-American scholar. Dr. Rolf respected his original theories and felt they were directly applicable to the study and embodiment of Rolfing SI. In an attempt to trace the threads of Rolf's early influences, I attended a ten-day seminar studying the work of Alfred Korzybski in 1997.

Korzybski developed the field called general semantics with his 1933 book *Science and Sanity*. At the height of the quantum revolution in physics, Korzybski integrated quantum understandings with the burgeoning research in human neuroscience and language. He "maintained that human beings are limited in what

they know by 1) the structure of their nervous systems and 2) the structure of their languages." Further, he emphasized that "humans cannot experience the world directly, but only through their 'abstractions' (nonverbal impressions or 'gleanings' derived from the nervous system, and verbal indicators expressed and derived from language)." Sometimes our perceptions and the language we use to describe our perceptions actually end in creating false conclusions. He emphasized that our understanding of what is happening often "lacks similarity of structure with what is actually happening" (quotes from Wikipedia 2015).

I recall early Rolfing instructors giving examples of the 'lack of similarity' in our descriptions as we were learning to assess and describe the structural patterns of the individual standing before us. We were instructed to use language devoid

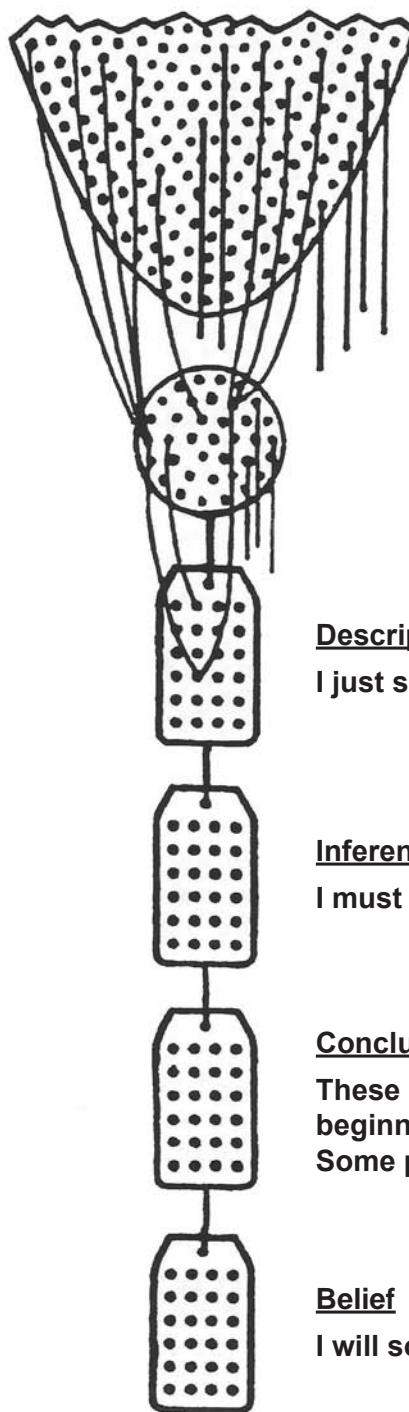
of personal projections, interpretations, or emotion. This was not always an easy task as we slowly learned to describe the territory we were 'assessing' prior to our flowering visual and mental constructs. However, there is more to the phrase, "the map is not the territory" than was often quoted. The rest of the phrase reads: "the word is not the thing" (it represents).

The words are maps, and the map is not the territory. The map is static; the territory constantly flows. Words are always about the past or the unborn future, never about the living present. The present is ever too quick for them; by the time words are out, it is gone." (Weinberg 1973, 35)

Delving into the roots of Korzybski's phrase "the map is not the territory . . . the word is not the thing" (it represents) sweeps the reader into a cursory exploration of Korzybski's theory of general semantics, which was quite amazing for the time in which it was written. The following represents my personal interpretation gleaned from Korzybski's writings and how this understanding may be applicable to the work of SI.

Korzybski noted how the brain and nervous system abstract (omit and/or automatically select out) the cascade of energies bombarding us at every moment beneath conscious awareness. (Just as an example, imagine eating a sandwich: the digestive system secretes enzymes to digest the sandwich, selects what is nutritious and eliminates what you do not need. This activity is totally instinctive, reflexive, without volition.) The brain and nervous system perform this function automatically and without conscious intention. He called this the *structural differential* (see Figure 1), and it summarizes the essence of Korzybski's work.

Another way to understand this process is to imagine a kitchen colander – the kind you strain pasta in. Now imagine that the universe – with its vast fields of vibrating subatomic particles (photons) pouring through the holes of your colander. Korzybski called this initial step of his structural differential diagram the event or process level. He also spoke of the shape being a parabola – or in mundane terms, a colander. Now in your imagination, attach a string to each of the particles that makes its way through the openings. Now,



Comment:
This person is good at jumping from one conclusion to another without verifying the correctness of one conclusion before going on to the next one. There is no evidence to support his belief.

Description

I just sneezed

Inference

I must be catching a cold.

Conclusion

These cold symptoms must be the beginning stages of pneumonia. Some people die of pneumonia.

Belief

I will soon die of pneumonia.

Figure 1: Korzybski's structural differential (from Greg Sawin's unpublished manuscript, 1985, given to the author). The top parabola-colander depicts the process or event level: the flow of quantum energies pouring through the universe all of which happens beneath our conscious awareness. The disc represents the sensory level. There is stillness and silence on the sensing level. "Words can sometimes blur my vision, dull my senses. Things are not what I say, think or believe they are. There are others who are not sensing what I am sensing." As we move to the tags below the disc we enter the descriptive level where labels occur. "There is a vast difference between words and what they refer to. The word is not the thing process it represents, any more than a map (or words, beliefs, understandings, theories, opinions, expectations, hopes, wishes, etc.) is not the territory it maps. Others may describe (or "map") the situation quite differently than you. They are not 'seeing' exactly what you are 'seeing', from your unique perspective." (Quotes from Dawes 1994.)

there might be numerous strings hanging through the holes of your colander. A human nervous system, through its varying sense organs, cannot perceive individual subatomic energies (represented by the hanging strings). It takes an enormous amount of these energies to make up something substantial enough to be seen, felt, smelled, etc. (Sawin 1985, 9).

From this process level with its zillions of quantum energies filtering through, we come to a sense level. Hanging from the process level (beneath the colander-parabola and its strings) is a disc. This sense level disc reveals the photon energies that are now being perceived through the nervous system. The other photon energies have been omitted (or abstracted out). Depending on our unique neurological patterns, gravity preferences, and sensory filtering systems, the vibrating photon particles streaming through are filtered according to personal biases and histories. Korzybski (1958, 238) put it this way: "We are immersed in a world full of energy manifestations, out of which we abstract directly only a very small portion, these abstractions being already colored by the specific functioning and structure of the nervous system."

A sensation results from a nervous system responding to and filtering (abstracting) out billions and billions of subatomic energies that are literally assailing us every mini-moment. All of this is happening on a nonverbal level, beneath our consciousness, and not yet on the level of words, ideas, or statements (Sawin 1985, 17).

Applying "the map is not the territory – the word is not the thing" to the SI framework, these phrases identify the difference between the nonverbal process level of reality (the quantum energies pouring into the colander) and the territory, and then the map – which for us is anatomy. 'The territory' represents the constant movement of extremely small subatomic energies that underlies everything. The body is movement. Rolf said the body is 'plastic' – pliable, changeable, and ripe for structural change. The breathing matrix of fascia is the territory. It is not confined to the map of anatomy.

Korzybski (1958, 387) said this about the quantum level of reality: "If we take something, anything, let us say the object . . . called 'pencil' and enquire what it represents, according to science [in] 1933,

we find that the 'scientific object' represents an 'event', a mad dance of 'electrons', which is different every instant, which never repeats itself, which is known to consist of extremely complex dynamic processes of very fine structure, acted upon by, and reacting upon, the rest of the universe, inextricably connected with everything else and dependent on everything else."

Our sensing bodies do not end at our skin boundary but perceive and metabolize beyond our skin. We are embedded in our environment. Our surroundings touch us as we touch our world. The Rolfing process transforms the density of tissues, enabling an individual's system to become more fluid, flexible, and responsive. There is a mutual interpenetration with surroundings. We engage a system that is intelligent, pliable, and expressive of life moving through its tissues.

Refer again to Figure 1. Notice the disc hanging from the process level that the parabola-colander symbolizes. The disc represents the sense level. What a person 'sees' is based on his interpretation of the light patterns that were perceived split seconds ago. When we imagine that we are responding to what is happening, in reality we are actually responding to an interpretation of the energies abstracted due to our own neurological biases. To live is to abstract; everything we do involves a level of abstraction (Sawin 1985, 13).

Additional strings hanging from the small openings in the disc represent the sense level. We abstract or filter out sensations and the meaning we assign to them according to beliefs, memories, stories etc. Hanging from this disc are placards illustrating a variety of events in time and which represent the descriptive (word) level of an individual's map. This descriptive level is keyed to earlier similar events in someone's life. We continually abstract from the level of process, the streaming sensations pouring through. Our interpretations of these sensations mirror our history and link us to a chain of earlier, similar events.

When an individual expresses herself via the descriptive level through words, phrases, stories etc. we move further and further away from the quantum event that is closest to 'reality' and the truth that lies beneath our sensation. The key to remember is that words are abstractions of reality. The 'story' a client tells herself (or the story we tell ourselves) is an abstraction

from the quantum event and sensation level. The words chosen may actually limit her (or us) to a particular belief system (map) about history, body, etc. – it is not the territory. Korzybski emphasized that words can only represent a fraction of an individual's experience of his/her reality. Words are limited as to what they convey and can often entangle a person in her story or beliefs. This is Korzybski understanding that "the word is not the thing" (it represents). Abstraction, like digestion, is a natural function; however, Korzybski encouraged his students to cultivate an awareness of the abstraction process and realize the level they were speaking from.

Applying Korzybski's Axiom to Rolfing SI

You may be gleaning the value Rolf placed on Korzybski's work as she taught her early students to 'see' and 'assess' an individual's structure coupled with her admonition to avoid projecting personal stories, ideas, beliefs, or feeling states onto their clients. In conversations I've enjoyed with the first wave of practitioners, I was told that she emphasized describing what was there and not what was imagined as an emotional component or a fantasy. For example, a twist in the upper thorax that lifted one shoulder higher was probably not an expression of 'angry' ribs. Practitioners were asked to 'see' the truth (the process level → sensory level), not an imagined history. They were asked to 'see' alignment unfolding through the fascial work of Rolfing SI and not as a re-interpretation of a story.

As we observe structure you might see a right shoulder that sits higher than the left shoulder or a right innominate bone that does not shift anteriorly with push off etc. It is easy to forget that an individual's structure when standing is a static expression of the reality of movement at every level. A client may begin to express her structural patterns in words that actually limit her availability to shift that pattern, or the practitioner may describe her structure with words that limit openness to transformative effect. The word-map we use to describe structural patterns or movement behaviors may actually lock these patterns into their tissues. At the verbal level, 'the map' consisting of words, descriptions, beliefs, theories etc. often limits and binds the territory. The anatomical map is a great resource but often stifles a practitioner's understanding of the integral

connectivity of the fascial matrix as living, breathing territory.

Turning to “the word is not the thing,” clients will report in statements like, “this is my dead leg,” or “this is my dumb foot,” or “I can’t stand up straight” . . . I’ve also had clients come from another practitioner and relate things like, “My Rolfer™ said this is my bad leg.” Although the Rolfing series may have been many years earlier, these words ‘stuck’ like glue and actually serve to solidify the body map. The words that are used to describe something are descriptions; they are therefore, by definition, abstracted representations that can both limit and inhibit the ability to shift structural patterns.

Here is an example from my practice that has to do with the labeling of a sensation and the restrictions that ensue. I was working with a young woman in a First Hour. She stated that she was beginning to feel a familiar sensation in her chest. Almost instantly, she labeled this movement as ‘fear’. I watched her chest contract and breathing stop. She reported, “It’s fear. I’m feeling fear.” I rested my hand gently on her sternum, realizing she had just jumped from the sensation level (sensing energy moving) to labeling this sensation as fear. Immediately, she launched into the story about her fear and hurriedly related a chain of associations from her history. In seconds, we had moved away from the quantum (the parabola-colander) and sensation level (the disc) into further abstraction.

I asked her to allow a breath and gently made eye contact with her while suggesting she sense her back settling into the support of the table. After she relaxed a little more, I asked her to describe the sensation she was experiencing. She said it was like something bubbling up inside her chest and that this sensation was familiar. She knew this feeling as fear with all its corresponding physical responses: stopping her breath, contracting her chest, tightening her calves, etc. This was also the pattern I observed in her body stance. The bubbling sensation had moved in milliseconds from the level of neutral sensation to the descriptive level and labeling of a feeling state carrying her further and further from the quantum process level and down the levels of the structural differential – her history.

I listened to her story, one that had been told times before, and said: “I’m curious, what might happen if you allow your focus

to be with the sensation of bubbling and lifted the label of fear off that sensation.” I suggested that labeling a sensation was like putting a strip of Velcro over it and that she could peel the Velcro away. I repeated this suggestion again and suggested that just for a moment she experience the sensation of bubbling. She agreed and responded with, “Wow, this feels like excitement.” However, it should be noted that even “excitement” is a label. Without labeling, sensation is sensation is sensation. It is not about replacing a ‘bad’ label with a ‘good’ label. Without abstraction, sensation is sensation is sensation and is neither good nor bad, and can be enjoyed or suffered. It is life moving through.

Perhaps the ‘bubbling-up’ that this person was experiencing now offered a novel interpretation for her. Moving from a label of fear to sensing the bubbling as sensation, there is renewed possibility to shift her structural set. This approach bridges Korzybski’s general semantics with the psychobiological taxonomy of Rolfing SI. The language we use to describe and label belief systems, feeling states, and story influences structural patterns and movement behaviors. Supporting a client in staying with the neutrality of a sensation (as energy moving through the body), without labeling (even a positive label), can begin to tease apart the threads holding together historical and patterned familiarity.

The map is not the territory . . . the word is not the thing. Oftentimes, the anatomical map and goals of a session need to be momentarily set aside when the patterned binding of the fascia appears to be limited by language and beliefs. In fact, the goals of a session may not be achieved unless the belief system begins to be addressed.

For example, in working with the CEO of a prominent company, he complained of chronic tightness in his neck. His shoulder girdle appeared to be held up by his ears. We worked to open adaptability in his legs and pelvis as support for his upper body but he continued to move as if his shoulders carried him. Then during Third-Hour back work he began to feel his shoulders relaxing and sense the support coming from his pelvis. After a moment of settling into this novel sensory experience he exclaimed, “If I don’t keep my shoulders tight, I won’t work hard.” He confirmed a long-held belief: keep tight to keep going. Here the challenge becomes to untangle the sensation of relaxing shoulders from the longstanding

belief that allowing ease meant being idle, sloth-like, and unproductive. We worked with the sensation of weight in the bones of his arms, sensing a space for breath in his axillae, as well as the movement of his scapulae when raising his arms. New movement behaviors needed to extend into his daily life: when driving his car or motorcycle, working at his computer, or addressing employees with company policy and profits.

Another side of cultivating the language of sensation with our clients is attuning to our inner sensation as practitioners. The question becomes what am I sensing? What happens in my own system as I come into relationship with living, breathing, moving tissue? How might I cultivate mindful attention to my own personal interoceptive state throughout a session? Where do I fall into the trap of labeling sensations instead of experiencing sensation without a label? How often do I forget the body is movement? Sensation is the language of the brain stem. Attending to sensation, without labeling, cultivates presence and a three-dimensional sense of inhabiting our ‘body’. Korzybski said the natural tendency is to abstract: the quantum or process level → sensation → descriptive feeling states → story → history or earlier similar associations. Thus, beneath every descriptive state is a sensation that is closest to the quantum level of process with zillions of photons pulsing through the field. Attuning to the sensation moving through our bodies is one key to a deep experience of our aliveness. It is also a key to the cultivation of self-knowledge. Whether we are sensing warmth or grounding to earth, or breathing the clean air at the seaside or in the forest, our internal sense (interoception³) is key to practitioner presence.

Speaking through Images

What’s your experience right now as you’re reading? Remembering that the word is not the thing . . . yet we need language, words, to communicate our ideas. Maybe you would say you are “curious.” Notice the feeling sense beneath the word. What are the body sensations this word evokes within you? What happens when you take the label off the word and just experience the neutral flow of energy-movement through your body? Like the bubbles in soda water – they’re just fizzy.

In our culture, the language of sensation is often limited to “I’m in pain” or “I’m out of pain.” In our sessions it’s important to help cultivate a language for sensation. If a client

speaks of pain, ask more about it: is it sharp, dull, all-over, throbbing, cold, hot-poker-like, intense pressure, squeezing, taking-breath-away, stabbing? . . . The language of sensation is the language of the brainstem. Research tells us that to shift posture you can't talk to the cortical brain. You cannot tell someone to just relax. It does not work. You have to speak of sensation to the brainstem, and you have to use right-brain language to begin to touch that dimension within a person.

So what is right-brain language? It is language that speaks with imagery, to the perception of weight and space, and which is delivered in an allowing and welcoming tone of voice (not a 'command', like the "stand up straight" many of us have heard over a lifetime). Use the poetry of images and spaciousness. The right brain understands spaciousness. The body heals when given space. The right brain knows images.

It is amazing what has stayed with me over these many years when the practitioner spoke with language that evoked spaciousness, allowing, and imagery. Long ago, an 'old-time' Rolfer was holding my cranium at my occiput and suggested the image, "Let this bone widen as if curtains are opening and the sun is shining in." Suddenly, my occiput dropped and widened. If he had told me in a commanding tone to "widen this bone," my occiput would not have budged. Find the elusive poet who often hides out in your right brain. (And, of course, there are those individuals who need more literal words and anatomical pictures. As practitioners, we meet the client where he lives.) Rosemary Feitis said, "what you feel, you will keep." When attention is given to sensation, our clients leave with a tissue memory of the possibility of being upright and moving easily within their own skin. A picture is worth a thousand words, but a sensation is worth a thousand pictures.

Conclusion

Our role as Rolfers is not as therapist but as educator. The Latin root of 'educate' is *educare*, meaning to 'bring out'. Our work includes the cultivation of language skills that invite, or that help decipher the invisible bindings a word or belief can have on a client's structure and movement behaviors. The manner in which we cultivate our own use of language invites and expresses a curiosity that may ignite

curiosity in our clients, their own body sense and self-knowledge. In our culture, the body is often treated as a machine – parts are removed and replaced, a war is declared on disease. Our bodies are living, breathing, sensing intelligence. In Rolfing SI we address an individual's structure and movement behaviors with goals of ease in movement, lessening pain, and supporting embodied alignment in the field of gravity.

I love the Rolfing process because in it I can be totally quiet. Often in the depth of quiet within a session, a dynamic stillness is the reverberating sound, the language, the field, and the space of my office becomes the temple of another's transformation. At other times, in the language of laughter or tears or explanation, somatic understanding transpires. The words we choose in order to evoke, explore, touch, and educate can ease and smooth the unfolding of life's vital movement through another's body. And I continue to recall Korzybski's axiom: "the map is not the territory – the word is not the thing."

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Endnotes

1. Quote from Alfred Korzybski written in author's notes from 1981 Rolfing training.
2. This class was co-taught with Rebecca Carli, assisted by Hiroyoshi Tahata and Kevin McCoy.
3. Interoception is the ability to read and interpret sensations arising from your own body. Blakeslee and Blakeslee (2007, 180) wrote, "The more viscerally aware you are – the more emotionally attuned you are." The tendency to abstract and label sensation is naturally part of everyday behaviors; the practice is to notice that's what we're doing.

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