

Fascia: Exquisite Medium of Human Expression

Olivia Ireland

Olivia Ireland currently studies at the Soma Institute of Neuromuscular Integration® in Buckley, Washington. She received her BA in English Language and Literature in 1993 from Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, having trained as a teacher and creative writer. During the past decade she has also served humanity as a Pilates assistant and mother to two dynamic boys. Whether studying bodies of literature, or those of humans, her passion is to uncover meaning and depth in human expression.

A rigid person is a disciple of death. The soft, supple, and delicate are the lovers of life.

-Tao Te Ching

A hundred years ago, a chiropractor named Andrew T. Still sat with paper with pen, composing his thoughts about fascia—and as he wrote, he breathed in awe of it. Reverence, utter fascination, and an almost religious fervor permeate his descriptions of the fascial network of the human body; and his essay, which might easily have been no more illuminating than any pedantic lesson on anatomy and physiology, is instead built around the metaphysical qualities of the fascia which continue to fascinate us to this day. Fascia is “the house of God, the dwelling place of the infinite,” he wrote, in which it is possible to “see all the beauties of life on exhibition by that great power with which the fasciae are endowed.”

This, at a time when quantum physics, energy medicine, and molecular biology, let alone the modality of structural integration, were as yet secrets held in potential by the fates for the future collective of seekers and scientists in the Western world. Still was visionary: He beheld something in the fascia, beyond what his hands could palpate or a scalpel delaminate. With the soft eyes of the mystic he beheld the “organ of structure” and realized that the connections it made extended beyond the ones that served purely the physical structure of the human body.

Body Made of Fascia

All fascia is connective tissue; but not all connective tissue is fascia. Connective tissue per se is found throughout the body, and is comprised of specialized cells (fibroblasts being the most common) surrounded by a ground substance, or matrix. This matrix, or ground substance, which everywhere bathes connective tissues in a nourishing broth of salts, water, and proteins, is a biological material without compare. Molecularly organized to such a degree that it is considered a liquid crystal, and enfolding as it does every cell in every body, it is designed not only to respond locally to pressure,

but to transmit that mechanical and piezoelectric information with unbelievable speed across the entire geography of the body. Impulses are essentially instantly transferred to the entire structure. A touch here, and a response here, there and everywhere. Our body-mind relies for its sustenance on the same principles that a spider, having spun, employs, settling at the hub of its web.

There are many types of connective tissues abiding within the matrix. Fascia is one of those types. It is dense, highly organized, and specifically responsible for defining the three-dimensional form of a body (if the muscles and bones were removed, and the fascia retained, the form would be completely legible). It is a continuous fabric which pervades and unites all body systems, wrapping each organ, muscle belly, even each individual muscle cell. Research shows the fascial network even penetrates each cell wall, giving form to cytoskeletons of microtubules which provide structure for each cell. By interdigitation, every cell of our bodies is in actual contact with every other cell, physically united into a whole. Matrix provides sustenance to this mechanical marvel.

Energy travels at a blistering rate through the whole body, but depends for its efficacy on the high level of organization of fascia. Collagen, thanks to its minute electrical polarities, aligns by design under tension and pressure. Normal, uninhibited use of the body actually promotes idealized fascial structures. (The converse is also true; a wound which heals under conditions of disuse heals with far less organization, and far more adhesion, in the form of randomly laid collagen fibers.) Even without input from outside sources, human bodies are built to align themselves, and they do, to the extent that it is organically possible within that system. And when in our work as structural integrators we introduce intentional, organized energy to such a naturally plastic medium, the piezoelectric fields within the matrix act as semiconductors, communicating both changes to structural fascia locally, and, via the communication pathways in the matrix, instantly throughout the body

as well. Structural integration promotes more organized, holistic responses within the body. Don Setty wrote that with mechanical release, the “vast communication complex of fascia has been stimulated toward ... a kinetic *stress-relieving* structure.” It is absolutely possible for our fascial structures to work for us. This fact is reflected in other modalities as well. Dick Larson has explored the close relationship between acupuncture points and fascial planes and intersections (or septa). He concluded that qi, the body’s source of energy and information, is found in reserve in the connective tissue structures, and that it travels on superhighways called by the Chinese practitioner meridians, each of which corresponds to a highly crystalline (more highly organized) fascial band. Research from the 1940s posited, in rather poetic terms, that the proteins in connective tissues were the stages upon which the play of life occurred, acted by excited, wide-ranging electrons; water in the matrix can also carry information, via protons. The matrix in Western terms is a dielectric semiconductor. For both Eastern and Western thinkers, though, there is common ground. Crystallinity serves to best reflect and propagate energy throughout the body, which, being built of fascia, is designed to meld form and function into a unified whole. Structural integration builds upon these reservoirs of life force.

But where matrix communiques are impeded by holding or gluing, the local area suffers from “impoverishment in the energy spectrum,” much as the blurred images sent from the imperfectly polished Hubble telescope in the 1990s failed to capture the full clarity of the images. Nourishment and energy are not as available to the body in bound areas, and so at those locations the body develops a “crutch to stabilize and support” (James and Nora Oschman) the injured body, effectively cutting part of it off from the system. The death of a part does compromise a body, even as its will to survive remains intact.

Fascia: From Body to Mind and Back

Considering its myriad forms, layers, and functions, it’s not much of a stretch to conclude that “connective tissue doesn’t lend itself to reductionism,” as Thomas Findley and Bethany Ward concisely put it. For that matter, neither does human psychology. And the two share even more common ground. For while fascia literally lends form to the body, it also seems to reflect rather precisely the quality of human-beingness residing within its envelope of blood, bone, and muscle. Structurally speaking, fascia lends us each our own unique individuality, for, as Dick Larson pointed out, body distortion can, and more pointedly does, happen as the result of—well, anything, really. No two bodies tell the same story, yet they use the same vocabulary. Gravity, for example, is a universal force, one that every bipedal body must reckon with, and it exacts a

universal toll: Ida Rolf said that every ache is a record of gravity’s effect on the body. Injuries, habits, and stresses compound it. And none of these is unavoidable. It would seem that just to stand up and walk on this Earth is to suffer. And there you find both the basis for our bodywork, not to mention a few major philosophies as well. Our work produces effects that reach beyond human form, into human life.

Just as our bodies seem designed to survive at any cost, and realign when attended to, so our spirits seem designed to seek meaning and connection as we navigate our lives. The corporeal adaptability to the slings and arrows of life finds obvious expression at the fascial level, certainly, for better and for worse, and we see it and feel it in bodies; but fascial realities probably reflect deeper truths, too. R. Louis Schultz and Rosemary Feitis drew parallels between the seven spinal flexures and the seven chakras, and concluded that holding patterns in these areas must be at once both structural and emotional. Robert Schleip wrote that fascial restrictions noted before a patient is anaesthetized do not actually appear to exist after anaesthesia; and posited that, to some extent at least, restrictions might be psychological patterns, and not purely structural entities. And in another article along the same lines, he wrote that holding patterns are a form of pre-tensioning by the autonomic nervous system, to help prevent re-injury where one had occurred before. In other words, to some extent the mind, and not the body proper, controls holding patterns, which seem to protect structure but which over time lead to unease, if not out-and-out disease.

Known Mind Vs. Unknown Mind (Intention and Soul)

How does work with structure bring change to the mind? We naturally intuit that people cannot be counseled out of their structural impediments or tendencies; conscious mind is only part of the equation. As structural integration practitioners, we do not purport to work the mind, nor are we licensed to. Yet if “the body is the personality,” as Ida Rolf famously established, if there is in fact no distinction to be drawn between body and mind, if they are insolubly one, we must ask ourselves then: *What are we really integrating?* For it can’t just be structure and the mind we already know. Our work is, after all, transformative, not palliative. Candace Pert, the molecular biologist whose work sought proof of being in biochemical terms, wrote, “The body is the unconscious mind.” The unseen and unknowable, as well as those things palpable to our senses, are alive in our clients and find healthy expression through our work. This is the evolution of the human being that Ida saw in the results of her work. A more perfect form creates the container for a more perfect personality. Here, integration of the Self in a

Jungian sense, with conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche welded together, meets integration of the structure in a Rolfian sense, where the visible comes into alignment with invisible forces we can only dimly reckon.

Consciousness is not found in its totality in the nervous system. If it were, our senses and our responses to them would satisfy all needs. We would sense no mystery in life; all questions could be answered; we would be born with the same mind as we died with. The human mind, the research shows, as it relates to a discussion of fascia, is quality of being, recorded in and throughout the body. And research suggests this might be true.

Robert Schleip contends that the brain “manages consciousness and the whole body is referenced in the process.” James and Nora Oschman, in *Matter, Energy, and the Living Matrix*, write that energy flows during bodywork point to “models of memory storage and recall that are based on ... holographic properties of the whole organism” not just its central nervous system (and indeed science has yet to pinpoint an answer to the question of where memories are stored). And according to Mae-Wan Ho, an organism is adaptable, alive, and responsive only because of its ability to store and provide energy at will through liquid crystalline structures found throughout the body.

Will, in this sense, arises not entirely from the conscious mind, for in her model, the nervous system plays only a bit part in the body’s intercommunication system. The matrix is a “whole-body circuit” of immense sophistication. It is as a vast, inordinately sensitive communication network which efficiently processes information from the environment in order to organize a supportive reaction, far more information in fact than our nervous system can. It perceives and reacts to a full spectrum of information which our conscious minds are not party to, but which is “closer to reality [and] based on far more information” than we can grossly perceive. Therefore, every action is initiated before we can consciously respond, in a fleeting experience outside the realm of our five senses. Here we see matrix consciousness as a repository of enormous spirit power and potential. Mind and body cannot be teased apart in these models. The extent to which our potential is realized depends on quality of our fascia, which our consciousness inhabits as fully as it can. The Oschmans contend that the liquid crystalline landscape that structural integration practitioners work is “the place where the body’s relations between matter and energy are manifest,” where potentials brew. At the junction of conscious and unconscious, humans may attend carefully to being and becoming.

Journey (Expressions of Unknown Mind) Rides on Quality of Body

Ho calls the two qualities of dynamic order and energy “intimately linked,” pointing out that energy flow is of no consequence if it cannot be given cohesion. This “closed loop energy system [is] structured in space time;” in other words, life happens, until you die. But it can only be a “vibrant coherent whole” when energy is not kinked within the fascia. Providing a sense of journey and movement is as much a function of fascia as the sense of order and coherence is. For while it ideally offers a body structure, solidity, and form, well-tempered and strong—it also just as ideally moves, is fluid, flexible, embodies, in other words, the *flow* of life. We were made to move. And while we can never know where we are going, we might become masters of getting there, but only if we move with clarity of purpose. As Candace Pert writes, “If I have a purpose, every system in my body gets behind that intention.”

While aligning the body in reference to external forces, structural integration serves also to align the person with a more palpable, true sense of the personal self; as Michael Nebadon puts it, a state of balance inherently implies “no resistance to self.” Will Johnson writes that physical ease and deeper consciousness are part and parcel of one another; that resistance in one will be mirrored as resistance in the other. That arbiter of bitter experience, the ego, lives its life desperate to create a sense of disembodiment so that it can maintain control of its own circumscribed reality. This is the life it was created for: to protect and defend the biological life of the body. But a sense of freedom, and of alignment with the flow of life forces, allows for “open and spacious” mind, which deposes the ego and makes available our untapped reservoir of psychic energies. Johnson conceives of pain as a guide showing us the areas we have blocked from integrating with our lives, and that acknowledgement and transformation, through the process of structural integration, brings new facets to the sense of self. Emilie Conrad-Da’oud has argued the same point, but in reverse: that the quality of the fluids in the connective tissues is governed by the quality of consciousness. In either case, it would seem that to connect to your own life, you must be made of healthy tissue, and vice versa.

Healthy fascia is designed to transmit experience of the present moment. When we are not burdened by past injuries, or pretensioned against the future, we then live fully and totally in the present. Life may then play out as “the Eternal Mind’s eternal recreation,” as Carl Jung termed the integrated self, as an unfolding mystery we become party to when we fully connect with our realities, seen and unseen. Valerie Hunt alluded to the coronal glow which so often bathes the saints, writing that Rolfing,[®] “like coherent light ... uncovers and taps

into the perfect body hologram and assists subjects to gain access to a primary body reality." By her estimation, fascial continuity would seem a portal to the divine in us. That unassailable presence sought by meditators becomes available minute by minute, whether or not we are sitting in full lotus. Conrad-Da'oud speaks to the temporal quality of "becoming" made real within connective tissues: "Continuum maintains that we are part of an unfolding process that remains intact within us." Michael Neadon, too, wrote that to find balance is to "transcend internal division, become transparent, and merge with the spontaneously unfolding movement of one's destiny." Our soul finds expression when we are in balance.

Navel-gazing is ultimately of limited value, all things considered. What good are the self-oriented if they remain self-involved? To claim depth of purpose we must acknowledge that we are part of something bigger than we can ever understand. Integration, the state of equilibrium which we seek to establish in our work, is by nature an "expansional" state [Neadon]. Away and beyond integrating a person with his physical whole, or to his own life journey, we also prep him to relate to his energetic environment in a clearer way. Here again the matrix takes center stage. Photons normally emitted from DNA find the perfect medium for transmission in the matrix, which translates it into electronic information, then back to photonic, "not just within the body, but also outside the body," between and among all bodies (Beech). The Oschmans turn to

quantum physics to describe this inter-relatedness: Molecules within the living matrix oscillate and vibrate, creating communications which are received by the living matrices of other beings. Here the field of energy generated by the heart chakra is described, hard empirical evidence that we cannot in actual fact exist separate from other beating hearts. To clear these channels of communication, by coaching the body to "cease to be parts" (Schleip) and live as whole, clears the path to becoming a fully functioning member of the human community. A coherent self is "implicated in a community of other entities with which one is entangled ... [wherein] sustaining others sustains the self ... being true to others is also being true to self." (Ho)

What does it feel like to be alive, really alive? Being biologically alive, that is to say, not yet clinically dead, can only be a small part of that feeling of being human. After ten sessions, sprung both consciously and unconsciously from our habits of bondage, and apprenticed into a working relationship with gravity, we find that previously destructive force investing the work with a positive, self-perpetuating therapeutic effect over time, to paraphrase Andrew Still. Might we even say: All the forces of nature, seen and unseen but ever felt, become willing participants in our life? That we become integrated not just mechanically, structurally, but psychically, with our deepest human potentials as embodied spirits.

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