

The Evolutionary Sequence

A Model for an Integrative Approach to Movement Study

by Kevin Frank and Caryn McHose

Part One

Rationale and Principles of Movement Related to Structural Integration

INTRODUCTION

From 1978 to 1984, Caryn McHose taught Experiential Anatomy at Middlebury College, Vermont.¹ The experience of teaching many classes of students confirmed that seeing and feeling specific body and body-to-space relationships transforms peoples' movement and changes their physiology. The classes also demonstrated the breadth of interest for such discoveries since it appealed to dancers, athletes, pre-med and liberal arts students alike. The Evolutionary Sequence, a further development of this curriculum, combines experiential anatomy with the story of evolution to produce a new series of movement experiments which can be a useful tool for group and individual sessions. This material is useful in RSI practice as a method for evaluation and teaching functional capacity.

We believe that certain principles underlie interventions that successfully facilitate qualitative shifts in movement. These principles are linked to third paradigm bodywork and models of body integration that come from biology. These principles

include the perception of the body as self-organizing, the importance of perceptual shifts, context, and palintonus in movement work, and the value of inquiry as a movement tool. Movement study is profoundly relevant to Rolfing® structural integration theory and practice; holistic structural interventions and holistic movement interventions are not separate events.

The Evolutionary Sequence offers students and clients a course of study which enlivens and excites bodily perception and provides motivation for sustained periods of movement inquiry. Participants build a base of perceptual skills to gain the capacity to change their body experience and consciousness, using a systematic map of movement possibilities.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES OF MOVEMENT WORK

Several principles and values underlie the strategies that will be described in this article. They are the answers we give to the questions, "Why do movement work?" and

"What are the primary characteristics of human learning such that certain approaches work well?"

THE BODY AS SELF- ORGANIZING

The first premise underlying this approach to movement work is that the body is a self-organizing event that takes place in relation to the earth's gravitational field. The goal of movement work is to assist people in consciously noticing this. The principle of self-organization is coherent with the principle articulated in Rolfing structural integration as *holism*. Holistic intervention is the means by which a practitioner gains access to the self-organizing systems of the body. If the practitioner wants to communicate with the self-organizing intelligence of a body, he/she must be able to think in terms of supplying perceptual and cognitive information, as opposed to the more traditional activities such as positioning, freeing, fixing, etc.

Movement teachers working from the point of view of what Jeffrey Maitland has called Third Paradigm Approach observe that when appropriate cognitive and perceptual information is supplied to their client, the client makes a shift in movement quality.² If a shift occurs, it is accompanied by surprise: a sense, in the client, that the body is behaving more intelligently than he/she is used to in voluntary control. For example, the

experience of feeling the transition from movement that requires a large amount of effort but leads to a small effect, to a movement of small effort with great effect is dependably interesting and often astonishing.

This experience is not only surprising and pleasurable but allows for healing, an improvement of physiology that comes from increased economy (diminished co-contraction, improved reciprocal innervation, e.g.) and from autonomic resolution.

Cognitive information offered in a movement teaching context includes defining the reason the client will find the movement experience important, worth paying attention to. The other part of the information will be necessarily perceptual. As Godard has pointed out, the work of RSI practitioners can be described as reshaping perception.³ Reshaped perception may lead to a change of shape of the body itself.

P E R C E P T U A L S H I F T S A R E P R I M A R Y I N M O V E M E N T W O R K

Thus, we arrive at the second principle: To change the quality of a person's movement (and to engage in communication with the body's self-organizational system), the primary intervention is an attempt to shift or enhance perception.

John Cottingham and Maitland have shown that RSI is effective because it is a systematic series of interventions that involve structure and perception.⁴ Structural change is not yet scientifically proven, and subjectively a client cannot know for sure that a change is structural. However, a perceptual change is self-confirming and, by teaching a client to track what they notice in body experience, the proof of a perceptual shift is in the person's experience.

The perceptual component of what is referred to as a "structural change" that is, a lasting change in body shape, may be a small or large part of the intervention. The amount of change that comes exclusively from pushing fascia or bone is, at this point, unknown. It is interesting to consider that deep pressure into the fascia may sometimes be a perceptual intervention as well, in that the value may be derived not from a change in viscosity or texture of the tissue, but rather from waking up deep perception, and the resultant shift in control from the brain.

From a movement point of view, the goal of structural intervention is to change the quality of movement of the client, such that body experience is more pleasurable, more effective. Changing the quality of movement necessitates changing what is perceived. For example, just calling attention to sensations in the body is, for most people, a change in perception. One can also touch or call attention to body locations: the skin, the sitting bones, the base of the skull, the feet, and so on. There are many ways of changing the sensations and focus of body attention. However, changing the perception also includes changing the way one notices the surrounding space.

C O N T E X T

How can we best change perception? Emilie Conrad-Da'oud answers this question by saying that in order to change the quality of movement, it is necessary to change the context of the movement.⁵ What is a change of context? What is the context of our movement before we change it?

An example may illustrate. I am typing at a computer. I have the goals to create words on the flickering screen; but also to convey meaning to an imagined future reader. My

posture and my muscle tone are minimally affected by awareness of my feet, sit bones, and the angle of my neck, because my context consists of an important goal which mobilizes me to type and think, and use my body unconsciously to support the chosen goal.

What if I close my eyes? Now suddenly there is a shift in my posture. Sensations that were formerly unperceived come into awareness. Warmth flows into my shoulders. I have changed the quality of movement by changing the context from my aforementioned goal to one of noticing what typing in darkness is like. I have changed from a goal-directed movement to a curiosity-directed movement with a particular element of context: closing the eyes.

Effective movement teachers can be observed using techniques such as this change in sensory information, as well as breath, imagination, sound, spatial relations, changes in pace and dynamics, changes in relation to gravity, and changes in relation to other participants or the practitioner. Changing these variables is what is being referred to here as a change in context.

This may still seem trivial until one examines the context of our attempts to shift movement through structural means. Most structural bodywork metaphors, including those of RSI, are derived from a biomechanical view. An engineering or biomechanical point of view is a wonderful educational metaphor and the metaphor alone produces a shift in client/student context, for a while. This view allows for systematic conversations in training practitioners, amongst practitioners, and between colleagues of different disciplines. But if structurally trained practitioners intend to change quality of movement, the biomechanical

point of view needs to be acknowledged as only one choice of context.

At some point, these clients or students whose only input is cognitive information in the biomechanical metaphor may start to move stiffly or "preciously." Have you observed this in structural bodywork classes? For those of us in the field of structural integration, our emphasis on "seeing structurally" may limit our perception of movement. The stiff student or client will demonstrate an immediate shift if one gives him or her permission to change context, if different sensory or perceptual information is given. Stiffness may suddenly disappear and be replaced with, for example, energetic, integrated movement, or fluid, graceful softness.

PALINTONUS

Following our trail of logic, we started by defining our goal as helping clients become conscious of their bodies as self-organizing in gravity. The shift in movement quality that underlies this experience follows from a change in perception. Perception changes most directly through change of context.

Parallel to the principle of self-organization is the principle of palintonus. Maitland cites Heraclitus as the source of this Greek word.⁶ We include it because it has become a useful way of defining an integrated quality of movement in relation to gravity. It makes the link from movement intervention in general, to what Godard and Frank have referred to as the gravity response, which is suggested in and is derived from the writings of Dr. Rolf.^{7,8,9}

The palintonic aspect of RSI and holistic movement intervention is fundamental. Graceful, economic, skilled function follows from the capacity to find a felt sense of two

directions: a sense of accepting gravity into the body, loading, dropping, or giving weight; and a sense of orientation to the space around one, to sky, inspiration, to the "other" in relationship. All movement that occurs in a gravitational field involves the consideration of these two directions.

In functional terms, palintonic capacity can be seen as, on the one hand, the capacity or lack thereof to load, to give weight, to competently push, and to feel the internal context; and on the other hand the capacity, or lack thereof, to reach, to lengthen up and out, and to feel the outside context. Thus, the reference to these two directions becomes central to the learning of movement, the analysis of movement, and attempts to influence another's perception.

Why is this so? Kevin Frank and Aline Newton have each offered summaries of Godard's explanation¹⁰.

¹¹ Human movement in particular and mammalian movement in general is intimately linked to autonomic reflexes designed to assure balance and upright stability in gravity. These autonomic reflexes employ the most economical pathways of coordinative control. At the same time, the human animal has learned to override, to "inhibit" the proper functioning of this coordinative system.

To access and restore harmony with the functional properties of the reflex system, we must look for the missing elements of perception, the places of inhibited awareness or expression in the palintonic model of perceptual elements. When the RSI practitioner or holistic movement teacher asks the question, "What is the missing palintonic element in my student?" the student is acknowledged to be a self-organizing event looking for information pertinent to gaining

palintonic function in gravity (termed "tonic function" by Godard)¹²

Underlying all choices of the movement practitioner to change context, to influence perception, will be a sense of needing to enhance perception of either of two directions, for simplicity, "up" and "down."

I N Q U I R Y

An additional principle that reflects the authors' personal style is the Inquiry Principle. It is the notion that movement education works best when it fosters curiosity. Thus, movement work implies that the teacher doesn't assume to know the experience of the student. The teacher is himself pursuing a path of inquiry supported by genuine curiosity. This allows for the possibility that the student/client will do something new, will innovate: another way of describing the experience of self-organization.

This point of view also demands that movement include generous allowances of time for the student/client to experiment, in the company of the teacher or other students experimenting with them. Without time to playfully explore the permutations of the movement, the potential for self-organization may remain latent and unappreciated.

C H O O S I N G T H E M O V E M E N T C U R R I C U L U M

The foregoing principles and ideas are the underpinnings for designing a movement curriculum that will facilitate a person's experience of themselves as a self-organizing body system and to, in fact, self-organize. The overview we offer here incorporates the principles stated and leaves room for flexibility and personal creativity. This curriculum has relevance to all of our biographies

because it is the story of biological evolution from which humankind emerged. The usefulness of such a story is that it refers to something we can see around us in the non-thought-created world, and it gives us attractive models for examining details of movement— animals, birds, fish, and primitive life forms of various sorts.

The ten session RSI series is, and has been, a way of organizing a sequential shift in body perception, ultimately allowing a person to experience their daily movement differently. It is a series of contextual inquiries, starting from an exploration of what is breath, what is rib cage, what is the outer boundary of the body, and proceeding to look at support, lateral line, and so on.

The sequence we are presenting here is also linear. It has a beginning, middle, and an end. However, just as one may do some third-hour work of RSI on someone who has had 50 sessions, so too can this menu be used out of sequence as necessary.

The Rolfing series references several graphic models of integration, including the skyhook at the top of the head and the plumb line to the earth, as well as other images derived from engineering. McHose's Evolutionary Sequence references the movement features of various life forms as models of integration. It begins with pre-cellular chaos and then proceeds from cells to more complex creatures: the cell colony, coelenterates, worms, pre-chordates, fish, amphibians and reptiles, and mammals. This organization contains models of integration that are biological in origin and therefore allow many levels of depth in working with individuals of different backgrounds and abilities while never succumbing to an implication that some qualities of movement are beginner and others

advanced.

The experience, for example, of the Volume Breath, which is presented with consideration of Cell, can be a simple yet profound initial experience—it can be returned to over and over, however, with a new and deeper appreciation of what having a boundary between self and other means and feels like. Simple aspects of body movement, such as lateral flexion of the trunk, or the re-enactment of the transition from sea to land and the acquisition of sagittal flexion that derives from this shift—these movements and the biological story that accompanies them continue to yield valuable discoveries in successive episodes. They also provide an intellectual framework for understanding the complexities of human movement.

In addition to the values and principles already stated, the Evolutionary Movement Sequence has as its basis these practical and theoretical points:

1. The forms that life has taken create a catalog for forms of movement.
2. This catalog of movement provides opportunities to address perceptual and structural (biomechanical) goals of the Rolfing sequence. These movements have also been found useful in working with trauma by providing resources that help the body work through autonomic resolution.
3. These forms of movement can be easily learned, but then, more importantly, provide a framework for long periods of individual exploration in class/session time and at home.
4. The intellectual content that accompanies discussion of different life forms assists the

change of context that allows movement to change rapidly and substantively.

5. The sequence provides a curriculum for examining what can be termed "palintonic perception," which underlies gravity response work and is the basis for evolving the astonishment that often accompanies the transition from one level of integration to another—the experience of self-organization.
6. This work enhances the capacity to deeply appreciate the natural world as an embodied experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The principles presented in this article, and the tools in the following article, are methods that support working from a self-organizing point of view. At the Rolf Institute, movement work, so called, has held the container for giving the body a chance to "talk back," to reveal and ask for what it needs to integrate. This hasn't been excluded in the structural discussion, but structural definitions, primarily from an engineering model, have taken precedence over cybernetic ones. Self-organizational models do exist in biology. Jim Oschman, Godard, and Peter Levine have articulated the biology-model approach and have thus helped to lend scientific credibility to RSI.^{13,14,15} The written and verbal record of Dr. Rolf has the principle of self-organization embedded within it. The field of RSI is acquiring concepts and research that more precisely define holistic bodywork, and thus these embedded principles can be articulated.

Cottingham and Maitland's article in the *Journal of Orthopedic and Sports*

Physical Therapy¹⁶ is groundbreaking in that holism, the third paradigm approach, is defined theoretically and empirically, and is measured through standardized variables of physical structure, and through measures of the autonomic nervous system.

Therefore, holism is no longer an abstract concept; it is an approach that finds those combinations of perceptual and structural interventions that allow the client to gain greater functional capacity, that enhance the self-organization of the body. The practitioner who has felt self-organizing changes in his or her own body will be increasingly motivated to think in self-organizational terms, and to articulate this definition in marketing bodywork.

With the emergence of self-organizational models big enough to embrace the scope of third paradigm practice, the artificial separation between movement work and structural work may now begin to break down. As it does, the work we call structural integration will inevitably be practiced more skilfully and holistically.

As practitioners we supply information to the client/student. In order to supply useful information, we must "track" the client, that is, observe from a perceptual point of view. It therefore becomes interesting to learn to track accurately and intervene perceptually. Those interested in growing their ability to notice perceptual capacity in clients may be motivated to deepen their own range of perception, and may find this self-organizational approach to movement work helpful in that regard. □

NOTES

1. The material from these classes constitutes the core of the book *Bodystories, A Guide to Experiential Anatomy*, by Andrea Olson with Caryn McHose, Station Hill Press, Barrytown, NY, 1991.
2. Maitland, Jeffrey, "Rolfing: A Third Paradigm Approach to Body-Structure," *Rolf Lines*, Rolf Institute of Structural Integration, Spring 1992, pp. 42-45.
3. Godard, Hubert, Lectures 1990-95, from class notes of K. Frank.
4. Cottingham, John, and Maitland, Jeffrey. "A Three-Paradigm Treatment Model Using Soft Tissue Mobilization and Guided Movement-Awareness Techniques for a Patient with Chronic Low Back Pain: A Case Study," *Journal of Orthopedic and Sports Physical Therapy*, Vol. 26, No. 3, September 1997.
5. Lectures from Basic Continuum class taught by Emilie Conrad Da'oud and attended by the authors.
6. Maitland, J., "The Palintonic Lines of Rolfing," *Rolf Lines*, Rolf Institute of Structural Integration, Boulder, CO, Jan/Feb 1991, pp 1-2, 43-49.
7. Godard, Hubert, op. cit.
8. Frank, Kevin, "Tonic Function: A Gravity-Based Model for Rolfing Structural and Movement Integration," *Rolf Lines*, Rolf Institute of Structural Integration, Boulder, CO, March 1995, pp. 12-19.
9. Rolf, Ida P., *Rolfing*, Healing Arts Press, Rochester, VT, 1989.
10. Frank, K., op cit.
11. Newton, Aline, "Basic Concepts in the Theory of Hubert Godard," *Rolf Lines*, July 1995, pp. 32-43.
12. From class notes of Kevin Frank. Noticing and awakening missing palintonic elements may also constitute integration of the nervous system. Awakening these places, and referring to them while attending to places in the body that feel deeply uncomfortable brings resource to the experience of distress in what Levine refers to as a titrated manner. See Levine's *Waking the Tiger*.
13. Oschman, James and Nora, *Reading on the Scientific Basis of Bodywork, and The Natural Science of Healing: A Biology of Whole Systems*, Nature's Own Research Association, Dover, NH, 1986, 93,94,95
14. Godard, H., op. cit.
15. Levine, Peter, with Frederick, Ann, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, 1997.
16. Cottingham, J., and Maitland, J., op. cit.