

Letter from the Embryo

Becoming

By Konrad Obermeier, Basic Rolfing® Instructor



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ABSTRACT *In the theme of 'integration', Konrad Obermeier reviews the process of becoming a human from the embryo, to birth, to post-natal embryo.*

The *embryo* is a specialist of *becoming*.
Becoming as a process is located in the continuity of *nowness* and this developmental movement has a distinct beginning: fertilization, and an unavoidable end: death.

Under specific circumstances a human ovum can manifest an amazing potential, it can initiate and maintain the process

of *becoming*. With unsurpassed beauty and elegance, the intimate, intracellular cooperation of nucleus, cytoplasm and membrane enable the unfolding of this potential through the skillful means of growth, differentiation, and maintenance. In a coordinated dance between the sound stability of genetics, the awesome activities of the cytoplasm, and the distinct discrimination of the



Figure 1: Embryos from posterior, length: 16mm, 30mm, 43mm. Volume, contour, and appearance change continuously. Embryological images and illustrations are originals from different publications by Dr. Erich Blechschmidt, used with permission from the author of this article and Kiener Verlag, Munich.

membrane, all the cellular components of the embryo relate to each other and to the environment in a meaningful way.

Initially the environmental field for this developmental movement is the uterus, equipped with a substantial number of relatively stable parameters. The predominant relational structure here is the placenta. After the fundamental and transitory change through birth, most relevant parameters for growth, differentiation, and maintenance will be less stable. Nevertheless, the *becoming* of the organism is not ending with this transition. Birth fundamentally alters the external circumstances, but the *post-natal embryo* keeps *becoming*. The environment is now called the world, topographically located on planet Earth, and *becoming* is the resulting totality of being impressed by this world and expressing into this world through adaptation.

After birth, *becoming* is the process in which the organism is extensively deepening the inhabitation of an unpredictable environment and expansively grows the relationship to this 'world out there' with more and more experience and refinement. *Becoming* mandates the necessity of interacting with increasing intimacy to an open environmental field. For the *post-natal embryo*, this is equivalent to relationships, and relating means being affected by the world. The world is a question, *becoming* is the answer (see Figure 1).

Ontogenetic development is lawful and obeys the rules of physics, chemistry, and biology. It respects the regularities of balancing metabolic gradients and engages the rules of fluid dynamics. The forces of fluid pressure and membranous tension always match each other perfectly. Internally the form, position, and structure of cells, tissues, and organs

continually change in this origami-like process. External volume, contour, and appearance morph and flow seamlessly through stages toward manifestation as an individual. And as always, manifesting only a transitory adult form (see Figure 2).

For the *post-natal embryo*, *becoming* is the manifestation of potentiality, the application of options, and the navigation between alternatives. The obvious changes of size, volume, and form of the organism are facilitated through the incorporation of fluid 'material'. This incorporation resides in the domain of biodynamic fluid forces. Additionally, the individual body realizes, co-creates, and maintains an active/reactive relationship with the environment on many levels, and at all times, until the end of its life.

We may assume that for any functional relationship with and in the environment, the *embryo* and the *post-natal embryo*

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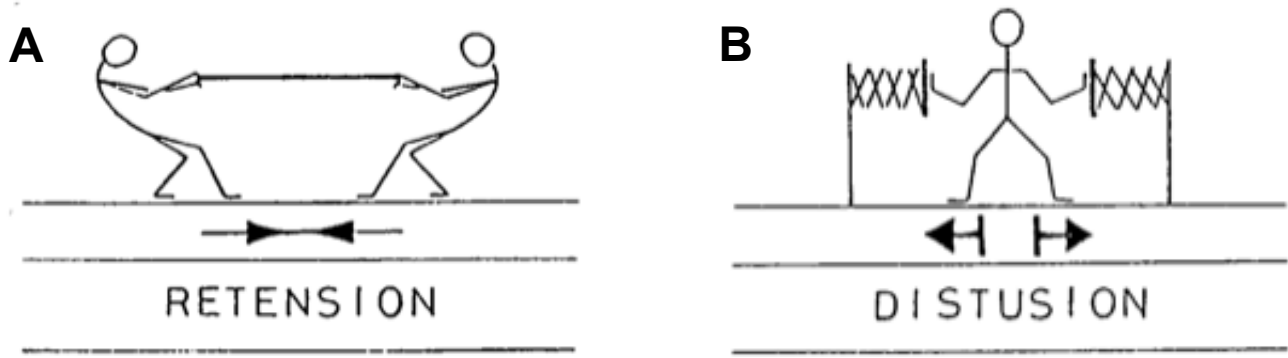


Figure 2: (A) Retension and (B) Distusion as examples of biodynamic forces met by cells, tissues, and the whole organism during ontogenetic development. Embryological images and illustrations are originals from different publications by Dr. Erich Blechschmidt, used with permission from the author of this article and Kiener Verlag, Munich.

keeps engaging in a two-way operation. One way of engagement is to move and express in an adaptive and meaningful way through locomotion and tonic function. The potential of this locomotive system can be explored and applied in countless ways, with a limited number of people becoming athletes participating in the Olympic finals.

The second way of engagement is to register and evaluate the world through the

potential of receptors and the processing of their activities in the nervous system. This fundamentally important haptic potential of orienting through the senses is continuously calibrated and coordinated with locomotion and becomes refined as a pivotal asset be it for survival, application of skill, or for pleasure. Perception does not exist *per se*, perception is never 'neutral', meaning free of motor activity. The two-way operation is actually a combined

single, integrated activity. Perception and motor activity are oscillating co-variations of *becoming* with 'expectation' being the background and the pre-movement of this senso-motricity.

The development of a physical structure (like a hand) brings along a potential of hapticity that can be realized in an infinite number of ways. For the *embryo* and the *post-natal embryo* hapticity is not restricted to the touch process alone. As soon as we understand hapticity as a fundamental developmental quality it becomes apparent for any other structure. Motor development and development of perception are integrated from the very beginning, they are (in-and-out) the heartbeat of *becoming*.

The structural manifestation of face and nose for example is unfolding within biodynamic forces, bringing along and opening up an enormous potential of olfactory hapticity (see Figure 3).

A beautiful and elegant example for the continuity of *becoming* in this sense is the training of the 'nose' for the perfume industry. Imagine a five-day workshop. In this weeklong training the nose, with all its potential for detecting airborne molecules, is exposed to fragrances from the sharpest to the smallest contrasts (see Figure 4). In the process of this 'education' (guided refinement and accumulation of experience) the owner of the nose becomes increasingly competent in perceptive differentiation and motor-navigating in an olfactory world.

To have a body *becoming* is to continuously learn to be affected by the *world*, to explore and be moved by this relationship, no matter how old this body is.

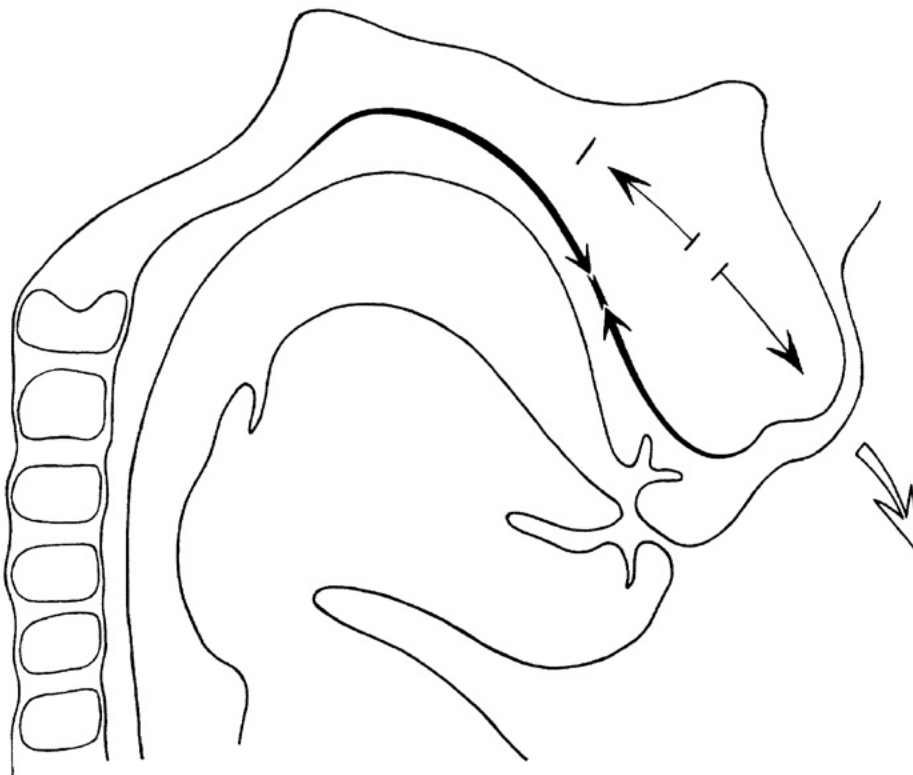


Figure 3: Illustration of embryo, 39mm. Retensional forces at the inferior septum nasale (connective tissue) meet distusional forces at the superior septum nasale (cartilaginous tissue). Embryological images and illustrations are originals from different publications by Dr. Erich Blechschmidt, used with permission from the author of this article and Kiener Verlag, Munich.

The embryo knows:

Relationship is substantial,
it empowers me to be
and enables me to thrive.

The author wants to explicitly express his gratitude to Hubert Godard. His comments and pointing out the paper of Bruno Latour: "How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies" (2004) was inspiration for this article. You can download Latour's article from his website at: <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/77-BODY-NORMATIVE-BS-GB.pdf>. Bruno Latour teaches sociology at the École Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris.

Konrad Obermeier holds a degree in communications from the University of Munich and has been a Rolfer since 1991. Currently, he serves as chair of the Anatomy faculty for the European Rolfing® Association. He is the editor of a series of books on the biodynamic embryology of Erich Blechschmidt.

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Figure 4: Embryo, 40mm. The tensional forces between the falx cerebri (neurocranium) and the thyro-hyoid ligament (viscero-cranium) lengthen the face and nose. Physical structures provide the structural topography for the simultaneous and ongoing development of receptors, senses, and haptic potential. Embryological images and illustrations are originals from different publications by Dr. Erich Blechschmidt, used with permission from the author of this article and Kiener Verlag, Munich.