

About Integration

By Pierpaola Volpones, Basic Rolfing® Instructor, Rolf Movement® Instructor



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ABSTRACT *In this discussion about what ‘integration’ means for Rolfers®, Pierpaola Volpones explores the many structures involved with integrating the complex human organism, including an exploration of walking and her personal experience of feeling integrated after a Rolfing session.*

The concept of integration brings with it a variety of meanings. Integration is the foundation of our work as Rolfers®, we aim to integrate our client’s structures. We work with people that are complex systems: we can consider a *physical structure*, the one that includes all anatomical parts; a *coordinative structure*, that consists of unique movement sequencing and timing that characterizes each of us; a *perceptive structure*, defined by how we use our senses, our sensors, and receptors; and a *meaning structure*, that includes our belief system and worldview that belong to the psychobiological realm. Each structure influences the others; any change in one will resonate in the others.

A huge question for us Rolfers is “what is integration?” I was assisting a Basic Rolfing Training and the instructor asked if someone would define what integration was. I replied that we can ‘see’ integration anytime we can see contralateral movement in walking. This movement needs to appear at the level of the limbs, the girdles, and the spine, all while the head is oriented and the eyes rest on a horizontal plane. The rest of the body moves, rotating with a spiral motion along fascial planes, involving a little muscular activity. Torsion and counter-torsion is a movement strategy that allows us to move around the ‘Line’ in a balanced way, while proceeding forward. In an ideal

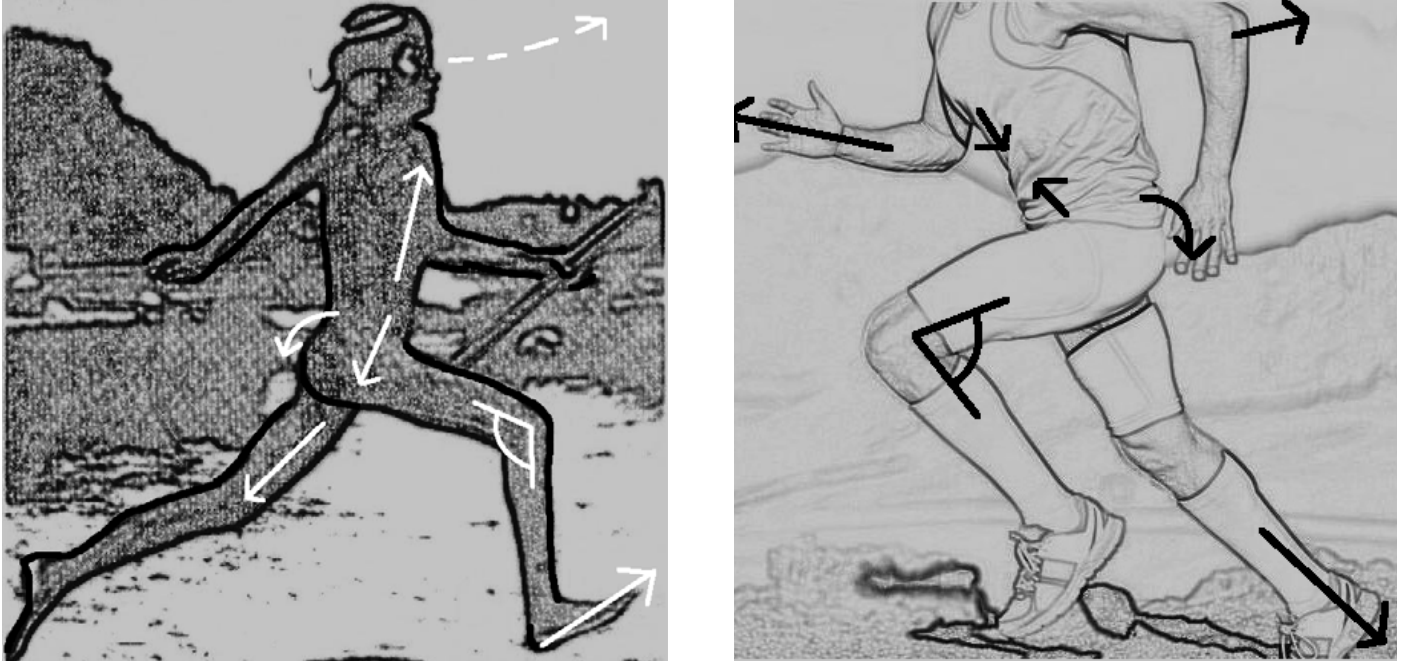


Figure 1: Both runners show contralateral motion at the upper and lower limbs. The one on the right shows a holding in his front line, the other one on the left shows an elongation of her trunk; she seems to have 'integrated' her spine in her running.

world, a spiral motion helps to keep the balance around the Line in a spacious way, to assure the integrity of the upper and lower body relationship, as well as the side-to-side, front-to-back, and inside-outside body relationships.

Looking at some more details about walking, the pelvis has a physiological torsion and counter-torsion: while reaching forward with the right heel, the right ilium is in a posterior torsion and in out-flare. The torsion helps to orient the acetabulum so that the femur can swing forward and rotate outward (see Figure 1). During the push-off phase of walking, the posterior leg is in extension, the corresponding ilium is in anterior rotation, in in-flare and the femur in internal rotation. Simultaneously, there is another contralateral motion between arms and legs: while the gluteus max is activated in the weight bearing leg, for example the right one, the opposite latissimus via the

lumbo-dorsal aponeurosis, brings the left arm back. Thanks to inertia, the weight of the body is displaced forward and due to the elasticity of the tissues, the opposite arm swings forward. The two girdles will counterbalance each other.

We can say that the contralateral movement of walking is the result of an integrated and combined activity based on the interaction of our myofascial and articular systems along the midline. When there is enough resiliency within the person's structure, elasticity in the soft tissues, and appropriate range of motion in the joints (that manifests a congruent stability and mobility), the structure shows the signs that we Rolfers read as *integration*: length, ease, alignment, and flow. Basically: we can see gravity flowing.

Integration of body parts enhances movement and gesture efficacy. But sometimes we 'forget' some parts of us. When this happens, the brain maps of

our body change; repetitive movements, gestures, trauma, and injuries modify the maps. It can happen that we lose presence and differentiation; as Jan Sultan says "differentiation precedes integration." It is possible we see clients use their shoulder to lift the wrist or they may move their pelvis and femur as one unit while walking. We might forget to differentiate our parts while moving because it hurts, our back might immobilize because it is part of our support system and we might over use it, or we might notice after pneumonia our chest cannot expand in all directions while breathing like it did before. After suffering a fracture, we might lose trust in that bone, we might have reduced mobility, and we can even forget that part entirely. Some parts become like a deserted house.

Rolfing SI and Rolf Movement sessions help to update the maps system within the client's nervous system, thanks to the

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manual interventions and explorations of postural habits and movement patterns. To fully inhabit our body, in all its parts, is an integration process.

So far, we have considered the physical and coordinative structure. What about perception and meaning? Looking in the dictionary, it says that *having integrity* means to have ethical qualities such as honesty, uprightness, rectitude, and also unity, wholeness, coherence, and cohesion. In Italian, my mother tongue, a piece of bread is 'integral' when it's made with whole wheat, a grain that has all its layers. We Rolfers work with people; we cultivate ourselves to be a unit of body, mind, and spirit. I believe and have experienced that we Rolfers touch all layers.

I was in New York back in 1987 and received a Rolf Movement session from Judith Roberts. My memory is blurry about what happened during the session, but I have a very vivid memory of the moment I sat back up on the table. It was a wonderful sensation of lightness, of length, my shoulders were wide and supported by the chest. But the moment Judith entered my visual field, all this space I was occupying with my liberated body was suddenly too much. Being so big and wide, in front of another person, was almost unbearable. The sensation of being too big, too arrogant, too visible was about to shut down the newly gained freedom. That was the moment where Judith helped me to *integrate* this new possibility that my body was experiencing: she helped me feel safe so I could be open and wide, taking my space, owning the space I was inhabiting, and do this without judging myself. She guided me towards a negotiation, something in between the very new, exciting place I was in and the very well-known one that had started to be too small.

My 'body image' had to find the way to follow, adapt, and integrate the new structure, to live in the newly integrated structure. My physical body was better integrated, I had a newfound freedom in my fascial layers and joints that made me feel light and spacious. I found a barrier built by my body image that kept me anchored in the present moment and also my ancient personal history. Some part of me was caught in the past and another was in the present. Just the manual interventions and table work were not enough to consolidate the process of transformation. Our expertise of manual Rolfing interventions

is capable of starting a process that takes the client time to integrate the new and to negotiate with their own past. When we support our clients to finish the session in a standing position, this is an essential moment to help the client to receive, welcome, and integrate the new. I'd like to think that Ida P. Rolf, PhD, had all these different and rich meanings in mind and heart when she named her method *structural integration*.

Pierpaola Volpones discovered Rolfing SI through bodywork and her research into well-being and somatic expression. She studied in Munich with Stacey Mills and Michael Salveson in her Basic Training and with Michael Salveson and Jeffrey Maitland in her Advanced Training. Her Rolf Movement training took place in Italy with Janie French and Annie Duggan. She began her Rolfing SI and Rolf Movement teacher training almost twenty years ago, and she has been teaching since 2006. She runs a practice in Rimini, Italy, and teaches for the European Rolfing® Association. Her website is www.volpones.it.