

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Hans Flury



(June 16, 1945 – June 18, 2023)

Medical Doctor
Certified Advanced Rolfer®
Swiss Society for Structural Integration (SGSI)¹ Licensed



St. Jakob church with chimes.
Photo credit Walter de Mello Neto.

In 1979, Hans opened an office at the Stauffacher tram junction located on Badenerstrasse in Zürich next to the beautiful St. Jakob church and courtyard where a very large Swiss clock had chimes that kept the time for his sessions.



By MaryAnn Skillman, RN, BSN,
Certified Advanced Rolfer®,
SGSI licensed'

The global Rolfing® community has suffered a great loss with the death of Dr. Hans Flury. Hans was born in Switzerland. For part of his early life, he lived with an American family in Baltimore, Maryland, where he spent some of his high school years as an exchange student. He graduated from medical school in Zürich, Switzerland, where he practiced medicine until 1977, when he went to California to see a friend for a visit. It was at this time that Hans was introduced to Rolfing Structural Integration. Hans received a Rolfing session that greatly improved his ability to function. Soon thereafter, in 1978, Hans attended his *auditing phase* of the Rolfing training, followed by his *practitioning phase* (the latter was taught by Jim Asher in Boulder, Colorado), where he became a certified Rolfer in 1979. He did his Advanced Training with Peter Melchior (1931-2005) and Emmett Hutchins

(1934-2016) in the early 1980s in Boulder, Colorado.

Upon returning to Switzerland, Hans spoke about how he was unsure how he would practice medicine and/or Rolfing work. That question was resolved when Richard 'Dick' Demmerle (1932-2015), the son of Ida P. Rolf, PhD (1896-1979), asked Hans to help him to open a Rolfing practice in Zürich, Switzerland. In 1979, Hans opened an office at the Stauffacher tram junction located on Badenerstrasse in Zürich next to the beautiful St. Jakob church and courtyard where a very large Swiss clock had chimes that kept the time for his sessions. It was at this location that for over four decades, clients and other Rolfers from all over the world came to see Hans, whose gifted hands (paws, as he called them) seemed to have an intelligence of their own in coordination with his ever-present analytical perception/eye.

Publications and Key Concepts

From May 1986 through to December 1993, Hans published seven comprehensive volumes of articles called the *Notes of Structural Integration*.² Contributing authors included Jan H. Sultan, Wolf Wagner, Peter Schwind, Willi Harder, Sebastian Schmidinger, and Thomas Walser, MD (see Figure 1).

Hans wrote that the field of structural integration resulted from a paradigm

change. Just as Rolf had great influence over Hans, Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) was a French philosopher who also influenced Hans' perception. Bachelard wrote about *epistemological obstacles* that Hans identified as mental blocks to the new stand-alone paradigm of structural integration, where there is always a temptation to retreat back to the familiar fields of pre-established knowledge.

Hans spoke about how fascia structurally is very different from fascia anatomically or histologically. Structural integration looks at the whole body within the context of an abstract coordinate system of axes, which are used to define relationships among the segmented parts of the body. These body segments are influenced by different forces, fields, tensions, and



Hans Flury (on the left), teaching one of his 'Normal Function' workshops with MaryAnn Skillman (on the right). Between them was a workshop participant who had arrived at the workshop in a wheelchair and left walking. (Photo courtesy of MaryAnn Skillman, undated.)

	AUTHOR OF ARTICLE	TITLE OF ARTICLE
May 1986	Hans Flury	A structural approach to movement.
	Jan H. Sultan	Towards a structural logic.
	Hans Flury	The shorter leg.
	Wolf Wagner	In search for integrity and lift in the human structure on tensegrity revisited.
	Hans Flury	Mini-session number one.
March 1987	Wolf Wagner	How can we know what works? A project report on the value of photographs.
	Peter Schwind and Sebastian Schmidinger	The temporomandibular joint in the combined view of a dentist and a Rolfer®.
	Hans Flury	On some aspects of folding.
	Hans Flury	Structural levels at the pelvis.
	Peter Schwind	Mini-session number two.
	Walser/Wagner/Flury	Technical catalogue.
December 1988	Editorial	The third finger.
	Hans Flury and Willi Harder	The tilt of the pelvis.
	Hans Flury	How can we know what works? Review of a study.
	Hans Flury	Elements of a structural theory of breathing.
	Hans Flury	Technical catalogue.
November 1989	Willi Harder	Physics for Rolfers.
	Hans Flury	Theoretical aspects and implications of the internal/external system.
	Hans Flury	Structure and its integration: The possible meaning of the terms.
	Hans Flury	Technical catalogue.
August 1990	Hans Flury	The longer and the shorter leg.
	Hans Flury	Sitting.
	Hans Flury	Shortness.
	Hans Flury	Technical catalogue.
September 1991	Hans Flury	Segmental standard rotation.
	Hans Flury	Normal function.
	Hans Flury	The Line, the midline, the postural curve, and problems of stance.
	Hans Flury	Technical catalogue.
1992/December 1993	Wolf Wagner	The influence of gravity, normal force, and anatomy on the shape of the body lying on a surface.
	Willi Harder	Seven elements of touch.
	Wolf Wagner	The results of Rolfiging and their reaction to structural integration.
	Hans Flury	The hip axis, the zigzag line, and the midline of the trunk as the main indicators of normal erect posture.

Figure 1: Table of contents for each of the *Notes on Structural Integration* (1986 to 1993) – edited and published by Hans Flury.²

From May 1986 through to December 1993, Hans published seven comprehensive volumes of articles called the *Notes of Structural Integration*. Contributing authors included Jan H. Sultan, Wolf Wagner, Peter Schwind, Willi Harder, Sebastian Schmidinger, and Thomas Walser, MD.



Hans' office is in the top portion of the building (but not the very top cubby-holed window areas). There were three treatment rooms, a large waiting room area with a resting area, and reading material. And a fifth room where Hans stored his materials. All these treatment rooms and the waiting room on the opposite side had windows from the floor to the ceiling. It helped immensely with the orientation of clients, so when they stood up to walk or to stand, they could look out at the great beauty of the church and all. Hans felt that they would orient to balance much more rapidly with this openness to the outside. Photo credit Walter de Mello Neto.

pressures. It was important to Hans that the profession of structural integration had clear concepts and well-defined, precise terminology for this stand-alone paradigm so that the knowledge and practice of structural integration would be clear for the practitioners and the public. It was this endeavor that motivated Hans to write and to invite other Rolfers to contribute scholarly articles for his collection of ideas found in the issues of the *Notes of Structural Integration* (see Figure 2).

These words and concepts in Figure 2, and others that are not listed, if well defined, could then be used so that a comprehensive, coherent, rational discussion of theory, interventions, and subsequent results could happen. Hans wanted to develop a clear theory that would link the domains of structural integration in ideas and practice. Explanations and descriptions of structural integration would then be accessible to empirical testing.

Empirically Minded

In one attempt to empirically test structural integration methods, Hans planned a two-day research event in München, Germany, on April 26 and 27, 1985. With the help and organization of his good friend Peter Schwind, Hans 'challenged' Peter Melchior to a *duel* (unbeknownst to Peter) where the two men would work for two days, delivering four rounds of sessions

to a total of eight model clients. Hans and Peter had four people each as Rolfing models, and impartial judges assessed the people's structures before and after the work. The judges were blind to who the practitioner was for each model, the people were professionally photographed before and after each session, and the judges wrote their before and after findings on their own.

It was a rough weekend of work for Peter Melchior as he had been looking forward to some free time on that Friday and Saturday after already teaching a full week of Rolfing classes in München. However, Hans said that he was a good sport about it. In the end, I am not certain who *won*; however, it was reported to be *close*. Peter did tell Hans not to ever do that to him again!

Flury's Structural Analysis

It is important for our structural integration colleagues to be aware of an article on the SGSI's website written by Hans Flury and Willi Harder to concretely guide structural analysis called "Structural Analysis – A Diagnostic Six-Step Schema" (2007).³ It begins with a clear conceptual guide to the differentiation between structural and functional aspects of a living body, thus allowing for clearer statements about the body's structural state.

This six-point system provides a framework for dealing with local concerns while keeping the whole body in mind. A key concept of the guide is to focus on the relationship of the parts, specifically within the structural considerations. Practitioners are given a suggestion to do a visual analysis followed by manual treatment of the client's connective tissues, with further analysis after interventions. Hans would say, "You have to judge your own work critically." He gave us this guide to assist us in that process.

Economy, Stability, Elasticity, and Resilience

Hans wanted his writings and the articles of our colleagues to be available to Rolfers® and structural integration professionals alike.⁴ Some of his ideas focused on structural integration's ability to promote stability. As fascia selectively lengthens, the existing inherent elastic tensile forces of the fascia can be

- Tilt and shift of the pelvis
- Segments in the sagittal plane
- Economy – lightness of being – lift
- Left-right organization
- Fascial network – shape – form – tonus – body stocking
- Front-back organization
- Standard torsion (rotation) of body parts
- Asymmetry – the body organizes to one side – multidimensional
- Organization around a vertical axis – the Line
- Primary and secondary shortness
- Sidebends and side tilts
- Balance and support
- Compensatory mechanisms – collapse
- Containers, tubes, hydrostatic compressional forces
- Organization of the segments to give a higher order
- Midline – horizontal line – transverse line – tangential plane
- Bones are spacers
- Passive tensile elastic forces of fascia
- Ideal structure = normal structure = best economy and lightness of being
- Active tension muscles fibers/islands of fascia
- Center of gravity – weight
- Curve/counter-curve of the trunk
- Ground reaction force – relationship to the gravitational force field
- The shorter leg and the longer leg
- Folding – the zigzag line
- Typology – the four types and their subsets
- Lengthening and bidirectionality

Figure 2: Some of the concepts and terms that Hans Flury strived to clearly define for the profession of structural integration.



SGSI organizational meeting in 2019. Hans is the fourth person from the left – photo courtesy of SGSI.

accessed and expressed. This results in economy and resilience.

What kind of structure permits the most economical function? What kind of structure permits better human functioning?

Integration occurs when the segmental parts are organized together into a whole living body in the gravitational field; ideally, there would be no resistance or mechanical impediment occurring between gravity and the normal force, allowing for effortless movement.

Structural integration exists in a well-organized, well-balanced, and well-supported asymmetry. The human body likes to organize itself to one side.

The ‘ideal’ structure/normal structure is a living body whose structure is in balance, allowing for effortless movement to take place.

Normal ‘Ideal’ Function

Normal ‘ideal’ function was introduced to the global Rolfing community when Michael J. Salveson, Advanced Rolfing Instructor, wrote about his experience in one of Willi Harder’s “Normal Function” workshops taught in the United States. “Willi has combined the work of Hans Flury with a basic course in physics for Rolfers and an introduction to ‘Normal Function’ and created a six-day class that will fundamentally alter the way you think about your work” (Salveson 1992, 26).⁵ In these classes, Hans suggested the possibility that structural integration changes obtained from manual therapy could be supported by *normal function movement*.

Hans taught normal function workshops in Zürich, predominantly in a large building that hosted music events near the main train station, from 1992 to 2014. Those workshops were three-day courses. He felt that learning normal ‘ideal’ function movement was mentally taxing. So, Hans would use various teaching methods and approaches in order to alleviate some of the mental strain.

In these classes, the concepts emphasized included letting go, doing less, letting the pelvis slide back, experiencing bidirectionality in a multi-dimensional body, a going apart, and accessing the deeper fascia of the anterior trunk area. Hans would invite us to allow for a ‘hanging’, a draping of the outer body stocking, which was frequently experienced by day three.

MaryAnn Skillman: It is important for our structural integration colleagues to be aware of an article on the SGSI's website written by Hans Flury and Willi Harder to concretely guide structural analysis called "Structural Analysis – A Diagnostic Six-Step Schema" (2007).³ It begins with a clear conceptual guide to the differentiation between structural and functional aspects of a living body, thus allowing for clearer statements about the body's structural state.

Hans would teach that the reduction of active muscle tension was about doing less so that the passive tensile elastic forces of the fascia were more predominantly present in movement with less effort. So, in order to *try harder*, one has to *do less*.

Hans talked about how normal function could be considered in conjunction with manual interventions to support integration of a person's structure in gravity. Also, he thought normal function could be initiated entirely on its own. Normal function can be adapted into any movement from driving a car to walking, standing, lifting, turning, sitting, dancing, or playing golf. The intention is to improve function resulting in more ease of movement.

The New Lightness of Being

Structural integration operates with the intent of inducing lasting structural changes in the direction of embodiment. Forfeiting this goal would be to move away from the tenets of structural integration. Integration and disintegration are a matter of *degree of order*, which always concerns the whole system.

Hans gave freely everything that he had developed with great passion and enthusiasm. Hans provided a *milieu* in the SGSI for questioning and dialogue as an opportunity for further exploration into the

field of structural integration. Formally, we meet twice a year for professional exchange. The magnitude of Hans' work will live on in what he has written and what he has taught to Rolfers and his clients.

Hans is survived by his previous wife, Sonya Portmann, who greatly supported his work, especially his writing and publishing of the *Notes of Structural Integration*. Hans' son, Graziano, supported his father, most notably by receiving normal function training as a part of his soccer training. Hans had another son from an earlier marriage. We extend our deepest condolences to his family.

Endnotes

1. In German, the Swiss Society for Structural Integration becomes Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Strukturelle Integration; therefore, the group acronym is SGSI. Not to be confused with a different group of colleagues, the Swiss Guild for Structural Integration, who are not in this network of Rolfers.

2. Hans Flury's *Notes on Structural Integration* are generously made available online by the Swiss Society for Structural Integration (SGSI) and can be found at https://www.sgsi.ch/sgsi/?page_id=265. Hard copies may also be ordered at a minimal expense.

3. On the SGSI website, there are many articles available for download.

Additionally, Hans' book is offered for educational purposes, at no charge, to view and download (available at <https://www.sgsi.ch/sgsi/> – remember that your web-browser can translate the page from German to English for you to navigate the buttons and links to Hans' articles that are in English). A copy of the Willi Harder and Hans Flury article titled "Structural Analysis – A Diagnostic Six-Step Schema" is available at <https://www.sgsi.ch/sgsi/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/structuralanalysis.pdf>.

4. In March of 1995, with the support of Hans' good friend and colleague, Peter Schwind, Hans wrote and published *The New Lightness of Being* in German. This book is richly illustrated with valuable photographs and diagrams that can be accessed from <https://www.sgsi.ch/sgsi/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Fluryocr.pdf>.

5. This one-page article titled "The Radical Orthodoxy of Hans Flury and Willi Harder" in the Spring 1992 issue of *Rolf Lines* is an editorial piece by Michael J. Salvesson about the technical approach of Hans Flury, MD, as taught by Willi Harder, a civil engineer before becoming a Rolfer. Willi's workshop title was "The Human Structure and Its Integration under the Perspective of Gravity and Normal Force."

MaryAnn Skillman RN, BSN, Certified Advanced Rolfer has studied with her mentor, Dr. Hans Flury, in Zürich, Switzerland, since 1995. Dr. Flury was one

of the founding members of the Swiss Society for Structural Integration (SGSI), of which Ms. Skillman is the only member from the United States.

The Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Strukturelle Integration (SGSI, in English, called the Swiss Society for Structural Integration) is an international group of Certified Rolfers® who are committed to continuing the inquiry regarding defining the terms and clarifying the concepts pertaining to the field of structural integration. The results of our ongoing inquiry are documented on the www.sgsi.ch website.

References

Flury, Hans (ed). 1986. *Notes on Structural Integration*. (Volume 1). Zürich, Switzerland: Self-published.

_____. 1987. *Notes on Structural Integration*. (Volume 2). Zürich, Switzerland: Self-published.

_____. 1988. *Notes on Structural Integration*. (Volume 3). Zürich, Switzerland: Self-published.

_____. 1989a. *Notes on Structural Integration*. (Volume 4). Zürich, Switzerland: Self-published.

_____. 1990. *Notes on Structural Integration*. (Volume 5). Zürich, Switzerland: Self-published.

_____. 1991. *Notes on Structural Integration*. (Volume 6). Zürich, Switzerland: Self-published.

_____. 1992/1993. *Notes on Structural Integration*. (Volume 7). Zürich, Switzerland: Self-published.

Flury, Hans. 1989b. Theoretical aspects and implications of the internal/external system. *Notes on Structural Integration* 4(1):15-35.

Sultan, Jan H. 1986. Towards a structural logic. *Notes on Structural Integration* 1(1):12-16.

Sultan, Jan H. and Lina Amy Hack. 2022. Internal-external is a perception of the nature of structure: A post-Rolf point of view. *Structure, Function, Integration* 50(2):36-43.

Keywords

normal function; Switzerland; structural integration; paradigm change; fascia; theory; empiricism; structural analysis; balance; asymmetry; *Notes on Structural Integration*.



Pedro Prado: I am proud and delighted to host the Flury material – and – I am equally pleased and very much honored by the fact that in each of the sixteen years of the library’s history, Hans himself was its most frequent user! He and I shared a chuckle about that.

By Pedro Prado, PhD, Rolfing® Instructor, Somatic Experiencing® Instructor

Dr. Hans Flury’s early work on fascial typology (Flury 1989b, see reference section above) was a part of my Basic Training at the then Rolf Institute® of Structural Integration (now the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute®) in 1981. It inspired me to envision the human shape anew and helped me to perceive the effects of gravity in human alignment. Since 1991, I have used the Flury typology, as well as the Sultan internal/external model (Sultan 1986, Sultan and Hack 2022), in my own teaching. It simply and efficiently opens the students’ eyes and minds to the essentials of structural integration.

Over the years that followed, Hans continued his investigations and theoretical explorations. Unfortunately, his work remained largely unknown beyond his own circle of students and colleagues in Switzerland. His group, the SGSI (see endnote 1 above), will miss him very much, I am sure, and they will carry on his legacy as they benefit from years of training and working with him. Hans conceived, edited, published, and wrote articles within the *Notes on Structural Integration* (1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992/1993). Though

the seven volumes were available by subscription, they were not widely circulated then.

In 2007, I established the Ida P. Rolf Virtual Library of Structural Integration (novo.pedroprado.com.br).

At that time, I reached out to Hans for permission to add the *Notes on Structural Integration* in order to make the library more complete and allow his group’s work to be accessible to the larger community. After some reluctance, Hans agreed, and the library is now one place where the entire collection is available.

I am proud and delighted to host the Flury material – and – I am equally pleased and very much honored by the fact that in each of the sixteen years of the library’s history, Hans himself was its most frequent user! He and I shared a chuckle about that.

Pedro Prado, PhD, of São Paulo, Brazil, is a member of the Rolfing® faculty and the Rolf Movement® faculty of the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute®. In 1981, he became the first Certified Rolfer from Brazil and brought the work to Latin America. He was a founding member of Brazil’s regional Rolfing association, Associação Brasileira de Rolfing (ABR). As well as being a clinical psychologist, Prado is a Somatic Experiencing® International Instructor.



Peter Schwind: Hans had a very well-educated and intensely trained mind. He was able to make any discussion more interesting. He never hesitated to question “opinions” in the light of empirical observation and logic. He seemed to have an innate immunity against belief systems. And he never hesitated to question his own statements.

By Peter Schwind, PhD, Advanced Roling Instructor

When I heard that Hans Flury was not with us anymore, I was overwhelmed with sadness. However, at the same time, many good memories came to mind. Some memories brought me back to our friendship – a friendship that can be characterized by many intense dialogues about almost any theme of the philosophical, sociological, and historical disciplines. Hans had a very well-educated and intensely trained mind. He was able to make any discussion more interesting. He never hesitated to question “opinions” in the light of empirical observation and logic. He seemed to have an innate immunity against belief systems. And he never hesitated to question his own statements.

In the 1980s, Hans Flury lived a sort of intellectual integrity that put him in a unique place to investigate the essence of the field, the concept, and the practice of Ida Rolf’s, PhD, ‘Structural Integration’. A while ago, I started to reread some of his, Willi Harder’s, and Jan Sultan’s articles published in the *Notes on Structural Integration* (see Figure 1 above). I also looked into the articles that Hans wrote for the German journal, *Do Zeitschrift Für Osteopathie*. In one of the articles, he discusses the different concepts of osteopathy and structural integration. His conclusion states clearly that the two disciplines are opposite to each other, while not excluding of each other. Great logic that may inspire those of us who live in – and in between – these two worlds of manual treatment.

Many years ago, Jeff Maitland, PhD, [retired Advanced Roling Instructor with the Dr.

Ida Rolf Institute®] co-taught an Advanced Training with me in the Dolomites, Italy. I used the chance to give a practical introduction to Flury’s movement work called ‘Normal Function’. I remember how Jeff was impressed by the depth and elegance of this approach.

It was a privilege for me to spend so much time with Hans. I will never forget the long evenings and sometimes endless nights where we used to discuss and argue. I wish for my young and mature colleagues to have a look at some of Hans’ writings. This is – in my very personal view – essential to give the thinking of Rolf a future that will be connected with the authenticity of her work.

Peter Schwind, PhD is a Certified Advanced Rolfer® and as an Advanced Roling Instructor, he is a Member of the International Advanced Faculty of the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute. He is the author of Fascial and Membrane Technique: A Manual for Comprehensive Treatment of the Connective Tissue System (2006) and The Croissant Inside the Brain (2018). Schwind became a Rolfer in 1980 after participating in basic classes with John Lodge and Jan Sultan. He did his Advanced Training with Emmett Hutchins (1949-2016) and Peter Melchior (1931-2005). Schwind has been building a bridge between osteopaths and the structural integration community for four decades. He is the founder and director of the Munich Group, an interdisciplinary group of manual therapists, where he leads the Munich Group media production for the video documentation of the work of Jean-Pierre Barral, DO (UK).



By Robert Schleip, PhD, Faculty of the European Roling® Association

Dr. Hans Flury had a strong positive influence on the European Roling® culture and beyond. He invited us to clarify the rational goals for each intervention and to be honest in confronting the effectiveness of what we do from a scientific perspective. A very sharp mind with a fantastic sense of human humor and a lifelong passionate dedication to changing human structure, not just posture.

Robert Schleip, PhD, Certified Advanced Rolfer, Rolf Movement® Practitioner, is an International Roling Instructor and International Fascial Anatomy Teacher. He has been an enthusiastic Certified Rolfer since 1978. Additionally, to his private practice and teaching, he directs the Fascia Research Project at the Technical University of Munich (TUM) University, which is at the forefront of international fascia research. ■