

Fascia: An Exquisite Medium of Expression

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Attention is a focusing, a narrowing of awareness; you can only make effort to pay attention. But ... you can't make effort to be aware. [Therefore] relax into the seat of consciousness ... it's a state of ease rather than a state of tension. Adyashanti, "The Fabric of Reality"

A review follows, of literature pertaining to the fascial system of the body, most specifically how it as a system serves as a crossroads between and among soul and body and world, and reflects unendingly the relatedness between all things.

All fascia is connective tissue; but not all connective tissue is fascia. Connective tissue can be defined as a continuous medium throughout the body composed of specialized cells (fibroblasts being the most common) surrounded by a ground substance (the matrix) of variable consistency and containing protein cells. Fascia is a type of connective tissue, specifically the one which defines the three-dimensional form of a body—sheets of dense tissue enveloping all other connective tissues, like muscles and bones. Andrew Still rightly terms it the "organ of structure."

Our fascia forms individual structures each as unique as the human contained within it. As Dick Larson points out, body distortion can and does happen over time as the result of anything and everything. Gravity, for example, is a force that everybody (every body) must reckon with. Every pain is a record of gravity's effect on the body (Larson, quoting Ida Rolf). That said, once a working relationship with gravity has been re-established through structural integration, this force can invest the work with therapeutic instead of catastrophic effect over time (Still). Don Setty echoes this, writing that, with mechanical release, the "vast communication complex of fascia has been stimulated toward ... a kinetic *stress-relieving* structure." The fascia can potentially work just as much for us as they can against us.

That fascia adapts to environmental, physical and psychological stressors which are slow to change means that it tends toward holding patterns—holding patterns which protect in the short term but eventually

lead to "dis-ease" or lack of ease on some level. R. Louis Schultz and Rosemary Feitis draw anatomical parallels between the seven spinal flexures and the seven chakras, and also relate that work in these areas reveals holding patterns not purely structural in nature, but emotional as well. Robert Schliep ran experiments on fascial restrictions and found that adhesions noted before anesthetization cannot be palpated once the person is under anesthesia, suggesting that fascia reflect an inner, psychological reality as well as a physical one. In another article on the same topic, he posited that the autonomic nervous system pre-tensions fascia to help prevent injury—psychological and physical. In all cases, research shows that to some extent the mind is connected to physical adhesions and blockages.

Does it follow that these structural issues do not exist outside of the mind's domain? How does body work bring relief to the mind?

We intuit that people cannot be counseled out of their physical impediments or tendencies. The reason for this appears to be that consciousness is not found in its totality in the brain, but is a quality of being, recorded in and throughout the body, most likely in the fascia. Schliep 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 body work 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). Mind and body are not easily teased apart in these models; and the Oschmans make a clear point that the body system that structural integration works is "the place where the body's relations between matter and energy are manifest," that it is made of a "living matrix" of body-mind.

Not just a repository of memory of past events and trauma, fascial connective tissue also serves as a vast, inordinately sensitive communication network for the body—a network capable of efficiently processing immense quantities of information from the environment and organizing a supportive reaction.

Chemical shifts within the body during fascial manipulation account for some of the communications: for example, endorphins are released during body work. Schliep notes that behavioral plasticity has been shown to increase

under influence of similar chemicals, probably as a way of allowing the body to make changes within shifting conditions. This suggests that structural integration probably does support neural-level reprogramming of habitual holding patterns.

But chemicals are responsible for adaptation in many areas of the body, not just the fascial system. Within the unique “liquid crystalline” landscape that constitutes the fascia, researchers uncover many new paradigms for intercommunication within the body. According to Mae-Wan Ho, an organism is adaptable (alive and responsive) relative to its ability to store and provide energy at will through liquid crystalline structures found throughout the body. The conscious mind, and the nervous system play roles as well in her model of a body's intercommunication system. Schliep writes that the subconscious is at play in the living matrix of the connective tissues; movement is initiated from them before we can consciously respond, in a fleeting moment of experience outside the realm of our five senses. The matrix seems a sophisticated "whole-body circuit" processing far more information than our perceivable nervous system, perceiving and reacting to a wider spectrum of information than our conscious minds are party to. Intuition (“matrix consciousness”) might be, then, "closer to reality [and] based on far more information."

Matrix, or ground substance, everywhere surrounds connective tissues, and is a material both extremely sensitive to input (mechanical, chemical, or electrical) and extremely fast in transmitting information through the body. Ho maintains that accuracy of transmission depends on the coherence of the matrix, and that where impedance is found (in an adhesion, say), the local area suffers from "impoverishment in the energy spectrum." Luckily, it also self-organizes continually, and it is this plastic quality which structural integration uses to its advantage. Piezoelectric fields within the matrix act as natural semiconductors for the sort of intentional, organized energy introduced by structural bodywork—so communicating changes to structure through integrative bodywork creates changes to communication pathways, in turn creating more organized, holistic responses within the body (Oschman).

It's not only the liquid crystalline matrix that changes in response to input. The more tightly packed connective structures within the fascial network do

as well. Dick Larson has explored the close relationship between acupuncture points and fascial planes and intersections. Qi, the body's source of energy and information found in reserve in connective tissues which interdigitate with every part of the body, travels on meridians which correspond to the more highly crystalline (more dense) collagen bands. The Oschmans do not talk use the concept of qi, but rather cite work by a researcher from the 1940s who first posited that proteins in connective tissues were the stages upon which the play of life occurred, acted by excited, wide-ranging electrons. They call the matrix a "dielectric semiconductor," and postulate that the crystallinity at interfascial boundaries may serve to accurately reflect and propagate electron waves throughout the structure. Water within the matrix can also carry information via protons. Whether called qi or dielectric semi-conduction, information exchange arguably occurs along the fascial interfaces, and only to the extent allowed by fascial integrity.

The kind of wholistic, smoothly functioning fascial health arising out of structural integration aligns a person with a more palpable, true sense of the personal self. Michael Nebandon defines the state of balance as the state of being in "no resistance to self". Will Johnson, too, asserts 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. Embodiment, as a lived experience of balanced alignment with the entire flow of life forces, is therefore a condition that allows for "open and spacious" mind, or a conscious sense of freedom. Johnson conceives of pain, or dis-ease, as a guide bent on showing us our shadows and blocks. Structural integration is, then, the transformational process of growing through pain to a renewed and broader sense of self. For her part, Emilie Conrad-D'Aoud goes so far as to say that the quality of the fluids in the connective tissues is governed by the quality of consciousness—that you can't be made of healthy tissues unless in fact you also seek meaning, freedom, and spirit.

It was the metaphysical qualities of the fascial network that led Andrew Still to conceptualize the fascia as "the house of God" and the "dwelling place of the infinite." Nebandon alluded to this same divine property within well-ordered fascia, writing that to find balance is to "transcend internal division, become transparent, and merge with the spontaneously unfolding movement of one's destiny." Some invest fascia with meaning beyond anything an individual could consciously comprehend.

The sense of transformation and metamorphosis, of journey, of courageous forward momentum, and above all, of movement is crucial metaphorically, in the case of structural integration's relationship to the fascia. Conrad-D'Aoud 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." For while fascia 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. Ho calls the two qualities of dynamic order and energy "intimately linked," pointing out that energy flow is of no consequence unless it can be stored to do work before dissipates (that is to say, before all of it is liberated in death of the organism). This "closed loop energy system [is] structured in space time;" in other words, life happens; but it is experienced as a "vibrant coherent whole" only when energy is not bound up within the fascia.

The ideal state for the human body, is by nature also an "expansional" state, not just a self-referencing one (Nebandon). This implies that structural integration serves a deeper purpose, one beyond physical manipulation of the body in relation to its own parts: that of relating the person to his life. Schliep maintains that structural integration establishes flow so that the parts of the body "cease to be parts" and the organism begins to influence its environment as it is influenced by it. The person can participate fully. Marilyn Beech describes how information in the form of photons is emitted from DNA, and recounts research showing that in fact the matrix material found intracellularly in our bodies is the perfect medium for translating photonic information to electronic information and back, "not just within the body, but also outside the body", and between and among all bodies. The Oschmans describe inter-relatedness in terms of quantum physics; that molecules within the living matrix might oscillate and vibrate thereby creating fields of vibration—communications which are received by the living matrices of other beings.

For as complex as her concepts about "dynamic feedback interrelationships" are, Mae-Wan Ho's suggestion that we can change, that we are not programmed, that we, as embodied spirits, are at the end of it all, continually active participants in life is the simple and profound truth we can see reflected in our connective tissue and fascia.

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