

Making Sense—Exploring a fundamental, non-verbal coherency

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Abstract

The challenge of ‘making sense’, invites an examination of the formulation and its relation to life. (Familiarity of the reader with General Semantics is presumed). A prerequisite to ‘making sense’ is a means to escape the ‘conceptual’ framework of language—the Structural Differential from General Semantics provides such a tool. The field of Complementary ‘Alternative’ Medicine (CAM) continues to re-evaluate the organism-in-its-environment. This paper explores the developing technologies of two pioneers in CAM, and suggests that these technologies enhance higher degrees of comfort and orientation at the objective level, facilitating the potential for clearer evaluation at higher levels of abstraction. Dr. Ida P. Rolf, developer of Rolfing® “Structural Integration” (SI) was a student of General Semantics. Emilie Conrad, founder of Continuum Movement©, studies Epistemics. SI practitioners manipulate connective tissues to allow for restorative function in ‘gravity’. Continuum practitioners develop inherent fluidity within the living physical body. Both practices provide new orientations and sense-abilities at the non-verbal level, facilitating a greater capacity to ‘make sense’ of our world.

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A non-aristotelian re-orientation is inevitable; the only problem today is when, and at what cost.
(1)

The IGS call for papers challenges us to review how we ‘make sense’. Looking at the formulation ‘making sense’ provides insight. The American Heritage Illustrated Encyclopedic Dictionary (1987) lists seventy-nine definitions of the verb “to make” and eighteen definitions of the noun “sense”. The one definition that combines the two words together in a phrase defines the meaning as “to be coherent or intelligible”. (2)

In physics, the definition of “coherency” is “of or pertaining to waves with a continuous relationship among phases.”(3) In this paper I will explore a general interpretation of *continuous relationship* and *waves* in relation to how we ‘make sense.’

Life

As living human organisms, our most obvious *continuous relationship* must be with life itself: We possess this as our default ‘phase’, our sine qua non: a presence. Life processes are fundamentally ‘wet’—we consist mostly of water, interpenetrating waves of complex coherencies. Our existence on land also demands that we acknowledge a continuous relationship with the physics of ‘gravity.’ If a ‘sense’ of life remains within us, we have some experience of an internal milieu in relationship with ‘gravity.’

Life’s innate feeling— a nonverbal, primordial, ‘sense’ of our living organism-as-a-whole— constitutes a presence that is more than a sum of its parts. This ‘sense’ facilitates and precedes any relationship with our environs. If we can find ways to enhance and enrich this default ‘sense,’ then well-being manifests, and a larger sense of community is facilitated— a common unity, a relationship with other individuals and shared environs. When a comfortable sense of ‘grounding’ with and in our surrounds manifests, a “natural order of abstraction” can begin and evaluations at higher levels of abstraction can occur.

Another of the main difficulties is that a language or a system of a given structure can be somewhat altered from within, but cannot be revised structurally without going outside the former system. (4)

General-semantics provides a methodology of evaluation that helps us to construct a coherent and intelligible world. The Structural Differential serves as a lodestone to guide ourselves back to a re-appraisal of ‘making sense.’ This practical tool justifies a re-examination of our non-verbal experience. It mandates the necessity to get outside the ‘concepts’ of language and revisit the non-verbal realm. It is this internal, silent milieu that Korzybski indicated, by mutely gesturing to the Structural Differential’s objective level, the first order of abstraction. Before we

can explore higher orders of abstraction, we need to revisit a ‘sensing’ within ourselves that involves a personal evaluation of our silent experience; how we *essentially* experience our surrounds and our internal milieu. New methods exist to explore and enhance this non-verbal level. Two methods hold potential to promote clearer evaluations at higher levels.

Complementary Alternative Medicine

Within Western society today exists a ‘complementary’ health care movement that, at various levels, has moved ‘outside’ the traditional views of Western allopathic models. Re-examining some of our assumptions about health and wellness may prove helpful in exploring the silent orientation indicated above. Seeking a more holistic interaction of the individual-human-being-in-the-environment, these non-allopathic approaches to ‘making sense’ include many diverse, inter-related disciplines.

Two influential leaders in Complementary ‘Alternative’ Medicine (CAM) were and remain deeply influenced by the teachings and students of Alfred Korzybski. Dr. Ida P. Rolf and Emilie Conrad employed the principles of general-semantics and Epistemics (5) respectively to significantly re-vision and create disciplines. The work of these pioneers in “somatic practices” (from the Greek word *soma* or body) promise a fundamental re-experiencing of what we mean when considering the ramifications of ‘making sense.’

Dr. Ida P. Rolf and Structural Integration

To Dr. Ida P. Rolf (1896–1979), a vital re-orientation was the relationship of the physical body’s connective tissues (fascia) with the gravitational field. This diffuse fascia, the organ of support and posture, determines our ‘felt sense’ of ‘gravity.’

Dr. Rolf earned a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Columbia University in 1921. As a biochemist, Dr. Rolf was aware that the connective tissues were not limited to muscles, bones, and joints. From a fascial perspective, the entire extra-cellular matrix, the microscopic aspect of connective tissue, is inherently a colloidal gel extending to sub-microscopic layers. This colloidal gel has the capacity to respond to mechanical pressures and phase shift from gel to sol. (6)

Dr. Rolf also studied the work of early osteopathic physicians like Dr. Andrew Still, who intuited that congestion of the connective tissues was antithetical to life and stated that the fascia was, "the framework of life, the dwelling-place in which life sojourns.”(7) At the microscopic level, the cyto-skeleton and extra-cellular matrix operates as a unified electromechanical and chemo-mechanical system to turn cell functions on and off. (8) All the necessary elements for the health and maintenance of the organism exist in, and pass through, this extra-cellular matrix, including functions of *analeptic geotaxis* (a restorative tropism or movement relative to the sensation of ‘gravity’). As such, the connective tissues are holistic, connecting us to our world and thus demonstrating a structure-function inter-relationship of the organism with its environs. The necessary resources for self-healing are contained within it.

Over a period of 40 years, Dr. Rolf developed a hands-on manipulation technique called ‘Structural Integration’ that became known as Rolfing®. (9) She speculated that manipulation of

the physical body could allow the gravitational force to therapeutically decongest the connective tissues, changing their acidic, gel-like character to a healthy, fluid quality. Other bodily systems such as blood, lymph, and nerves could then function efficiently. 'Gravity' could be a therapeutic force:

Some individuals may perceive their losing fight with gravity as a sharp pain in their back, others as the unflattering contour of their body, others as a constant fatigue, yet others as an unrelentingly threatening environment. Those over forty may call it old age. And yet all these signals may be pointing to a single problem so prominent in their own structure, as well as others, that it has been ignored: they are off balance. They are at war with gravity. (10)

Dr. Rolf formulated the basic protocols for her work during the 1950s. From 1952–1962, Dr. Rolf attended five general-semantics seminars. She began teaching her work in the late 1950s, and continued throughout the course of her life, founding the Rolf Institute for Structural Integration in 1971. Her lectures included frequent references to Korzybski and general-semantics. (11) She consistently urged her students to reconsider their thinking habits:

I bid you to examine your own ways of thinking and looking...Your security lies in your ability to look at these levels of abstractions and thread them apart. It will give you a great deal more security in your intellectual and emotional life if you can do this, and not simply say 'I feel.' (12)

Korzybski realized the importance of the living electro-colloidal matrix. He wrote extensively on the "bewildering possibilities" (13) of colloidal behavior (Chapter IX in *Science and Sanity* is dedicated to the subject). He speculated that sanity depended on electro-colloidal, sub-microscopic levels of functioning of our nervous systems (14), that colloidal structures corresponded to large numbers of semantic states and reactions (15), and that it was within the colloidal processes that a bridge between the 'physical' and the 'mental' could be found. (16) Emphasizing the primary role of the colloids in semantic health and dis-ease recognizes the importance of forces acting on the whole body from the macroscopic scale down to the cellular level and beyond.

So many therapies are striking at the pattern of disease, instead of supporting the pattern of health. One of the things you as Rolfers must always emphasize is that you are not practitioners curing disease; you are practitioners invoking health. (17)

The subjectively reported benefits of Rolfing include improved posture and symmetry, enhanced freedom of movement, deeper and easier breathing, increased energy and lower tension levels. Many people report a new sense of ease in their bodies, feelings of lightness or "lift," and deeper and more restful sleep. 'Emotional' relief is often associated with Rolfing as a by-product of creating deep changes with the body. For some the process is purely physical; for others it can be a deep 'spiritual' awakening.

This is the gospel of Rolfing: When the body gets working appropriately, the force of gravity can flow through. Then, spontaneously, the body heals itself. (18)

Our felt sense of the gravitational field has the potential to pervasively influence our non-verbal orientation. Conditioning the connective tissues with structural integration methods has the potential to promote systemic cooperation. Clearer orientations and sense-making can result and provide for a grounding at the silent level of objectivity.

Emilie Conrad and Continuum Movement©

Emilie Conrad is the director and founder of Continuum Movement© (19) a unique approach to wellness through movement. Born in New York City, she studied ballet and Afro-Haitian dance, and subsequently spent many years living in Haiti as the lead dancer in a folklore company. Choreographing and immersing herself in traditional native dance, she was deeply inspired by the indigenous dancers' rolling, snake-like movements. Seemingly springing from the earth itself, the undulations and pulsations of movement in communion with nature deeply influenced her 'somatic' inquiry.

In 1967, she started a movement exploration that was eventually called Continuum. Experimenting with intricate, slow, spontaneous wave motions, she began to seek non-verbal answers to these questions: As living systems, can we engage in the formative tendency of life more directly? As intelligent beings, can we live in a culture but not be bound by it? Does our organism have a destiny separate and apart from the concerns of personality?

From 1974 to 1979, Conrad was the movement subject in a research study led by Dr. Valerie Hunt at UCLA. (20) A related study demonstrated that emulating wave movements in slow gestures is intimately linked to our capacity to innovate. (21)

In early development of Continuum movement, Conrad involved people with spinal cord injuries. Her essential question was, "If we are movement, then what is paralysis?" No official protocol has ever been developed for the elaboration of spinal movement in cases of paralysis. . Perhaps 'paralysis' exists in the formulation and not in the spine. If we acknowledge ourselves as dynamic energetic systems that are primarily movement, we could say that in paralysis there is a compromise in *function*, but not in *movement*. What Conrad discovered is that movement can innovate new functions. (22) When working with people demonstrating such extreme physical compromise, Conrad began by introducing a variety of breaths. Breath activates our fluid systems, bringing about novel intrinsic movements where the pulse of life becomes apparent. Using breath in a profusion of ways, warmth and flow appear in tissues previously frozen and unresponsive. As intrinsic movements become more abundant, a neurologically rich matrix is created for the budding of new neural pathways. (23)

Conrad believes that our ability to innovate lies within our biological core. Movement, or the lack of it, relates directly to how we breathe. In the case of trauma, breath is usually suspended, which will in turn suspend movement. Shock will contribute to paralysis by its emotional immobilization. Spinal shock sometimes wears off, but 'emotional' shock can go on for years.

Another development of Conrad's work was an exposure to Epistemics (24), which profoundly influenced her ideas. A distinction could be made that a *sensation* was fundamentally not about a *description* of the sensation. "[Epistemics]... was invaluable to me...once you've taken this

in, it never leaves you...(the) silent world, and what happens when we speak, and that we don't acknowledge when were talking.”(25)

At the scientific level, we know we are immersed in a world of movement. Objects that we think of as static are moving, but not in discernible ways. With various rhythms and frequencies, movement is constant. Korzybski noted this with the ‘event’ (parabola) section of the Structural Differential. (26) While we can acknowledge movement at the event level, on a macroscopic level our conventional notion remains that movement is some-thing that turns on and off. Usually, it is conceived as a specific observable activity: walking, or running, or scratching our heads. When we stop these activities, we become “still.” We are “not moving.”

What we commonly see as a physical body is basically movement that has become stabilized. A newborn essentially remains a system that reveals the movement of water made flesh. We witness in infants a fluid system meeting the gravitational field of the earth, where an elegant exchange begins to take place. As this exquisite system adjusts to its new atmosphere, a gradual stabilizing occurs. Liquid grasps, eyes focus, experiments are made. An infant rolls, thrusts, jerks, and gurgles while trying out the sequences that will ensure survival on land. An identification with stabilization grows and settles into our manner of thinking; it appears the only way to survive, to exist.

Stabilization comes at a high cost. Western culture, in particular, has brought about a stabilizing ‘industrialization’ of the body, with a devastating and alienating effect. The repetitive movements of the gym and the keyboard are accepted as desirable, even glamorous, and this ‘mechanization’ lies at the core of how we interact with and describe our world as we hurl along, frantically multi-tasking our senses. Yet, with our numerous gadgets, little meaningful ‘somatic’ resonance occurs within us, or in our relationship to the planet. What occurs instead is a “mechanized colonization” of the body. The very speed of the technologies that we thrust into our worlds leaves us few ways to slow down and make sense of our ‘somatic’ experience. Mesmerized within a daily shower of the rapid visual imagery of technology, saturated as it often is with the Aristotelian formulations of commerce and politics, ‘body-minds’ appear robotic and stupefied. As a result, living human systems rigidify and collapse in the literal weight-of-the-world, with little support or coherency.

In Continuum, a distinction is made between what we call functional movement, which implies a “body,” and biological movement, in which the body is *not* a designated object and *does not* maintain a specificity of form. It holds a bio-morphic potential. In this potential, Conrad asserts that fluid movement, properly understood, constitutes our *existence* and *relationship* rather than our *activities*. Conrad further asserts that as human beings, we represent an accrual of many life forms that have been shaped by our oceanic origins, still pulsating, as the intrinsic world of our organs, our connective tissues, and nerve fibers. We are a *process* of millions of years of an open-ended experiment. Our forms have been designed and redesigned, unendingly adaptive and innovative. The very nature of stabilizing impels our fluid system to gel, giving the support needed to become functional. Fluidity consolidates as new requirements are met. Our oceanic memory may pale as the demands of life on land become more immediate. Much is forgotten, but the primordial characteristics of our intrinsic environment remain. We learn to crawl, stand to move forward through savannas, mountains, cities, and outer space. However, we remain

composed of 70 percent water: our fluids resonate with their surrounds, a unity without boundary that extends outward to resonate with the sphere of planetary water and further to the galaxy and cosmos. The fluids in our bodies remain our fundamental environment: we represent *moving water* brought to land.

Summary and Conclusion

‘Making sense’ implies a non-verbal experience as a default condition from which to begin. The Structural Differential represents a practical tool that points to the critical importance of ‘getting outside’ language. The silent level of the natural order of abstraction invites us into a deeper coherency as we explore our continuous relationships with our internal milieu and the environment. Dr. Ida Rolf and Emilie Conrad have created ‘somatic’ technologies that facilitate a valuable ‘sense’ of ‘gravity’ and ‘fluidity’. Experiencing these technologies can potentially result in greater sensitivity, comfort and clarity, thereby facilitating a dynamic, organic orientation from which to develop general-semantics skills of critical thinking. When we remember our primal inheritance and our primary relationship with ‘gravity’, we re-establish a “natural order of abstraction.” This can serve us as we further explore what it means to ‘make sense’.

Form remains temporal and transitory—the need to continually reconfigure is inherent. Failure to reconfigure signals the form’s demise. Stabilization of the physical body, while vital for efficiency and survival, can result in unresponsive, rigid structures un-informed by new probabilities and subject to accelerated entropy. Maintaining such an ‘identification’ of the body as our only designated form, we, as biological systems, actually narrow our vectors of expansion. Increased stabilization compromises adaptability. Infants have a capacity to heal because they *are* ‘flux’—mutable and relatively open systems. Healing becomes a more arduous process as we fall victim to our assumptions about our bodily reality. We can encompass more than one description, relate in restorative ways to forces surrounding us. Structural Integration and Continuum can facilitate means to learn from our ‘flux,’ and help us find a ‘re-sourcing’ of somatic nourishment. Away from culture and conditioning, finding a *new* sense of environment and re-discovering our *ancient senses*, makes sense.

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- 2 *American Heritage Illustrated Encyclopedic Dictionary*, (1987), p. 1020
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.344
- 4 *Science and Sanity*, p. xlv
- 5 "Epistemics" is an interpretation of general-semantics developed by J. Samuel Bois. Editions of *EPISTEMICS*, *The Science-Art of Innovating* and *Explorations in Awareness* are available by contacting the Continuum Studios, 1629 18th Street #7, Studio 7, Santa Monica, CA 90404, Office (310) 453-4402 or email: www.ContinuumMovement.com

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- 7 Still, Andrew T., *The Philosophy and Mechanical Principles of Osteopathy*. Kansas City, MO. Hudson-Kimberly Publication Co. (1902), p. 64 Available at: http://www.interlinea.org/atstill/eBookPMPO_V2.0.pdf
- 8 *Cells, Gels and the Engines of Life*, p. 263
- 9 Rolfing® is a service mark of the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration (RISI). The website for RISI is www.rolf.org. RISI is a non-profit organization approved by the State of Colorado as a private vocational school. Many different schools citing lineage to Dr. Rolf's teachings have adopted the term "Structural Integration" to describe their work. The International Association of Structural Integrators (IASI) functions as the umbrella organization to foster cooperation between these schools. The website for IASI is www.theiasi.org. The Rolf Institute remains the oldest structural integration school and the sole certifying agency for training Rolfing practitioners.
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- 19 Continuum Movement© is a registered trademark. Continuum is a Category A provider of continuing education credits for the National Certification Board of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB). For more information contact: office@ContinuumMovement.com
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Author Bio

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