

Elegance: The Paradox of Embodiment

Darrell Sanchez

Darrell Sanchez, PhD, is a Certified Advanced Rolfer™, psychotherapist, Rolf Movement® Practitioner, Craniosacral Therapist, and professional dance instructor and performer. He is moved by expressions of elegance wherever they appear, whether in dance, structural integration, or as revelations of mastery in other fields of endeavor. Darrell may be reached at darsaninc@gmail.com.

Introduction

The ocean is full, deep, powerful, beyond our comprehension, yet restrained by its shores. The same is true for rivers and their banks. We look at oceans and rivers and see what we can see, but what we feel is much greater than what meets our eyes. And so it is with the paradox of our embodiment, as our tendency toward overflowing life and expression splashes against the constraints of our bodies. The graceful resolution of this paradox in a person's movement, bearing, and expression is the felt experience of elegance.

Mastery, Embodiment, and Elegance

In my journey in the healing and performing arts, elegance is a quality that I seek to facilitate in others and to express in my own movement conveyances. The paradoxical qualities of movement and being that are expressed by the concept of elegance apply not only to dance or movement, but to the development of mastery in any art or field of endeavor. The better we become at something, the more fully and easily our exercise of that skill expresses elegance. This even holds true in that most fundamental of human ventures, our experience of "embodiment" itself.

Being embodied means the capacity to fully experience and to *be* one's body. It means a sense of wholeness in that all systems and aspects of being human work together in an integrated and coordinated manner. Yet it also confronts us with the inherent limitations of our physicality and subjection to gravity, limitations that dance with our internal and external awareness. From these limitations the door to fuller embodiment opens us to the whole range of human expression, from the mundane experiences of daily life to the grandest experience of radiant presence while being in human form. Thus structural integration, with the increased embodiment it invites, gives rise to elegance in the body. Whether practitioner or client, the more embodied a person becomes, the more elegant he or she grows to be in the following ways.

The Refined Grace of Embodiment

In the animal world, we might associate the grace of elegance with the arcing leaps of a gazelle, the powerful carriage of a tiger, or the agile gliding of swallows. We also associate it with the flowing movements of dancers. There is an ability to move with ease and suppleness, a quality of movement and presence that also emerges in the structural integration process. A body that is unencumbered by compensations moves with an effortless and elastic sense of assured locomotion, expressive sweeping lines, and easy posture. We also see this in adept dancing, or in any balanced, functional movement.

Grace is typically associated with beautiful movement. Yet the mind as well can express grace and elegance: in our thinking, our way of relating, our way of being in and understanding the world. When we are elegantly embodied our movement becomes graceful, and our stance in relation to our environment, to life, and to others may begin to express grace as well, in a larger and more spiritual sense of the word. When a graceful body is accompanied by a graceful state of mind, there is a holistic coherence across the person's whole being. This transformation, this opening to a more poised way of being in the world, is a profound manifestation of human dignity and worth.

The refined grace of elegance reflects a process of enhancement and fine-tuning, as movements or postures that were coarser and rougher become freer and more appealing. The means of refinement in structural integration is the series of sessions, a progression of accumulated experience of being more in harmony with the flow of gravity. In this refinement we come to live and own what we learn, and then we are open to learning and owning what comes next.

Beauty, Richness, and Sumptuousness of Design

We recognize in our clients' transforming structures a developing harmony of form that pleases us, that satisfies our shared sense of what we find beautiful in the human frame. There may

be a hint of sumptuous elegance, an impression of something splendid, luxurious, or magnificent about their changing bodies. Like elegance, a client has yet to come to me specifically asking for structural integration to make him or her more "sumptuous." But words they use, such as "juicy," "freer," "more alive," "more energy," indicate a desire for a fuller, more glorious experience of life in the body.

As compensations are released, the richness of design of the human body is revealed in its potential for graceful movement through any plane of choice. This rich complexity of our bodies allows for the countless activities and movement forms we come up with, including athletics, occupations, dances, musical instruments, and so forth. In the integrated body, richness of design corresponds to a richness of movement—a nearly infinite repertory of functional movements that can be exercised with ease, expressive movements that are eloquent and interesting, and therapeutic movements that are transformative and beneficial. Refinement through structural integration develops the depth, intricacies, and potential of the relationships inherent in any movement form.

We all have experienced, even if in fleeting moments, the sumptuousness and richness of our bodily design in the course of our daily lives or in the activities that impassion us. Our sense of a spacious and integrated structure, the span and freedom of a body in attunement with gravity, sparks our imagination in regard to our clients, inspiring us to encourage in them a new vision for the potential of their bodies.

Restraint and Efficiency: Grounding the Body's Exuberance

How can something be sumptuous and rich, that is to say, luxurious and magnificent, and also be restrained or limited? What is the restraint that paradoxically meets beauty, richness and sumptuousness to create elegance? A feeling of generous opulence flows through our senses, yet we are held in reservation by some limiting influence. In dance or music, the requirements of a particular form, such as tango or jazz, are the constraining influence. In the case of structural integration, the restraint is determined by the form of the human body. In the elegant body, beauty and sumptuousness coexist with and flow through the inherent limitations and constraints of our structure's design.

One of the limitations of our embodied state is our connection to the earth. We are held by gravity, yet from the ground we can open and rise into a generous and sumptuous expression of being. As structural integration enhances the elegance of our human form and its containing function, there is a fuller, freer, more

refined channeling and expression of energy, ideas, and emotions. At the same time, this exuberance of beautiful expression is tempered by our rootedness, our centeredness, our ability to first of all be where we are.

A mark of elegant expression is the poise with which the paradoxical tension between restrained centeredness and expressive flowing richness is resolved. The sculptures of Michelangelo come to mind with their centered vitality and supple flowing lines. We witness elegance when the paradox of splendor and restraint shows up in a particular body's movement as the emergence of something that, with ease and suppleness, transcends them both. In one moment we may see the splendid richness and in another the restrained grace and beauty of the containing design. In still another moment we may find ourselves witnessing the mutually resonant interaction of the two, or the emergence of a new state that resolves the paradox with a transcendent nondual wholeness.

In this union, there is the essence and fullness of beauty free of any pressure to overdo. We may appreciate the splendor of our experience without being overwhelmed by what is unnecessary to that beauty. A rich design tempered by restraint suggests that nothing superfluous is added or expressed in the movement we are seeing or experiencing, informing us that the elegance of embodiment is also efficient. What is learned by the body-being in the refinement process of structural integration is simplicity, as the body discovers more effortless and efficient ways to move.

Working Elegantly: More with Less

Efficient precision is a hallmark of elegance expressed through mastery in any field. In the case of structural integration, less work and effort are needed to invite change. A single interaction may result in a new flow of movement through the body. The increased efficiency that is the sign of elegant work arises in part from recognizing *where* to work for greatest impact. It also reflects an ability to establish a touch-dialogue in which the practitioner can receive and interpret information from the client's body regarding the parameters of impactful touch: its depth, direction, and duration. This touch-dialogue is itself a sign of elegance in the interaction: restraint and groundedness coupled with a richness of communication.

Graceful, efficient work reflects mastery, and mastery takes time, dedication, and practice. Yet fortunately, most people will manifest their inner capacity to move toward fuller embodiment in response to the SI process. I don't always feel elegant through every moment of a session; at times I may

feel as though I'm laboring to push an overloaded derailed train over tracks buried in snow and ice. Yet I nonetheless orient toward, facilitate, and enjoy my clients' emerging elegance, and the elegance of the process itself. To my continued amazement, the train starts moving on its own, lining itself up splendidly on the tracks. Given the right input, even overtone, dense tissue, exhibiting a cold lack of motion and loaded down with history and dysfunctional patterns, will reconfigure itself with unexpected ease and precision.

The Physical Signs of Elegant Embodiment

Elegance is a way, in fact, of describing with a single concept the rich complex of physical and experiential signs of increasing embodiment. We see a body and mind that can experience a release into gravity and a corresponding upward lift and expansion of the core in all directions, in a manifestation of dignity and beauty. Joints are free to express fluid spirals of graceful movement that are, nonetheless, grounded and centered. Breathing is integral with the resilient contractions and expansions of the body in sumptuous motion. Movement appears and feels efficient, unobstructed. Invisible and generously extending lines of motion and intent become visible to the imagination, and are experienced kinesthetically, as elegance is revealed in the postures and gestures of the human form. These are part of an ever refined awareness and sensitivity in the body to its relationship with gravity, and with the world as a whole.

Conclusion: Elegance as a Transcendent Quality of Embodiment

Structural integration generates elegance through our bodies by developing a new relationship to gravity that opens us to a more magnificent and graceful way of being in the world. Yet, to recognize it, we must be able to connect with the full and luxurious generosity of a greater something that we sense, but cannot quite grasp. The more we experience something elegant, the more we feel it brush the fingers of our perception like a fish we reach for that keeps slipping just out of our grasp. With elegance we never really grab the fish, but rather allow it to swim in the flow of our embodiment. It takes us to the edges of human expression where our attempts to explain it are futile.

To witness it we must open our minds and receive the paradox, amazed by the eternally elegant expressions of a manifesting and integrating life force. Our witnessing goes from a deep sense of gratitude for the beauty of what we perceive, to joining with it in a state of presence, of mind, of being. Elegance delivers only that which is required to bring the moment, and the movement, to a fullness of beauty. It comes through with a grandeur that takes apart our resistance and opens us up to the wholeness of embodiment. As in a single, easy breath, the paradox is resolved.