



THE WELLNESS SALON

Musings on wellness from Donna Simmons, Feldenkrais® practitioner

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*The body as machine*¹

For better or worse, I live in a part of the world where the *automobile fine* is ubiquitous, and where its care and feeding is elevated to an art form. Aside from the oddity of so much wealth being assigned to a thing whose sole function is typically restricted to the transport of one person to and from work, I am struck by how much attention we pay in general to the *machines*² in our life (cars, computers, coffee makers); how much energy we expend on their care and understanding their idiosyncrasies, their needs. Of course, we do this because we want them to last, although the lifespan of a car is typically no more than 10 years, 25 tops, and our computers/tablets/smart phones are replaced every time “they” “update” the operating system. So what about the machine that matters to us most (hint: the one that we are inextricably connected to, joined at the brain, as it were)? How much do we really understand about its care and feeding? How it’s put together? What makes it work? Admittedly, the construction of the human body is many orders of magnitude more complex than the most sophisticated car or computer, but I would venture to guess that, on a relative scale, many of us have a comprehension level about all things mechanical (outside of ourselves) that far exceeds our individual knowledge of the mechanics of the *human machine*. And yet, we certainly want our bodies to *last*...

This is not an insoluble problem. In earlier times, knowledge of the inner working of the human machine was limited to those who had access to cadavers. Thank goodness this is no longer true. Nearly everyone has access to the vast body of knowledge regarding the construction of the human form, knowledge that has been accumulated, for the most part, over the past 100 years³. Still, even an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Latin names of the various layers of muscle, fasciae, nerves and circulatory systems that overlay our skeletal frame is not enough. A practical knowledge of how our body is constructed is one that permits us to make *adjustments in behaviour* to improve the quality of our life.

I have devoted my practice to helping others understand their own machine better, thereby guiding them towards a more stress-free life. Inasmuch as the human machine is not just an assemblage of inert parts, but rather an organic composition of life-forms (think of your gut), cellular structures such as bone and tissue (also life-forms) and bio-chemical and electrical information pathways all organized under a single (hopefully!) awareness, working with bone and tissue also involves some level of emotional engagement. And this, of course, is the adventure of life.

Namaste, Donna

¹ Please note that I intend no metaphysical meaning, ala *Descartes*, in this phrase or in this discussion...

² Google: mid 16th century (originally denoting a structure of any kind): from French, via Latin from Doric Greek *makhana* (Attic Greek *mēkhanē*, from *mēkhos* ‘contrivance’)

³ I recommend *Anatomy of Movement*; B. Calais-Germaine; Pub. By Eastland Press 2007, a very good basic text.