

ANATOMY

SKIN

Excerpts from 'The Wider Field' by Miranda Tufnell

The skin is the largest, oldest and most sensitive of our organs. The ectoderm, from which brain, nervous system and all our senses develop, forms an outer surface for the developing embryo and this vital connection between skin and nervous system continuous throughout our lives (p.123). 'The skin is a porous membrane. Electrically and chemically, the world moves right through us as though we were made of mist' (John Bleibtreu, 'Parable of the Beast') (p.124).

The sense of touch is the first of our senses to develop and is our earliest means of communication. In infancy, lack of touch causes a wasting in all the tissues similar to that of malnutrition. The sensitivity of the skin keeps us 'in touch' with the world in which we live and belong (p.123).

The skin contains some 500 million sensory cells that are connected to the spinal cord by over half a million nerve fibres which continually provide the brain with information about touch, pressure, cold, heat and pain. Skin cells are also sensitive to vibration, sound and sunlight (p.124).

The skin is a place of meeting, a border and surface of exchange between ourselves and all that surrounds us...a window, letting in, letting through, the touch of the world. What is within us shifts and changes according to what we meet, only in meeting is there any kind of knowing ourselves (p.122).

Through the surface of the skin, the whole body listens and looks out, moment by moment informing us of where and how we are. What touches us and what we ourselves reach out to touch, shapes every aspect of who we are. The chemistries of our body constantly change in response to the flow of information felt on the skin – the sound of a voice, the scents of cooking, the feel of a conversation – everything that happens around us...leave their trace within the tissues of the body and within our bodies, we sense and respond with feelings, thoughts and imaginings (p.122)

Through touching we discover and feel.....the hand becomes a bridge, connecting, opening pathways.... The hand is formed from 27 small and separate bones which allows its extraordinary delicate and intricate precision of movement. There are more nerve endings within the fingertips and lips and more of the cortex is devoted to them, than any other part of the body (p.131).