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A Special Note of Thanks from Stanley Keleman

To Jacqueline A. Carleton, PhD, for her human and editorial expertise in leading this journal issue to fruition.

To Gerhard Zimmerman, MD, for his diligent and competent work as the coordinator/co-editor/liaison.

Stanley Keleman

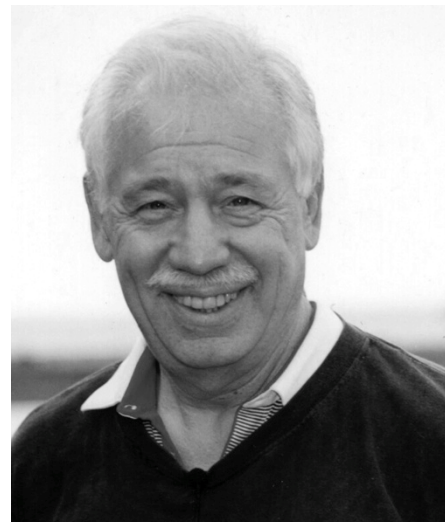
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USABP Mission Statement

The USABP believes that integration of the body and mind is essential to effective psychotherapy, and to that end, its mission is to develop and advance the art, science and practice of body psychotherapy in a professional, ethical and caring manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity (revised October 1999).



2005



1991



Stanley Keleman and his family

Stanley Keleman

Stanley Keleman's interest in the body has always been experientially based, beginning with an early involvement in athletics and continuing in his education at the Chiropractic Institute of New York, from which he graduated in 1954. After starting his practice as a clinician, he began to observe the relationship between conflict, organ movement and distortions of body posture. Following his interest, he initiated a program of training and research into the life of the body. He became a member in 1957 of Alexander Lowen's Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis and was, until 1970, a senior trainer. He attended the Alfred Adler Institute and his thinking was affected profoundly by Adler's ideas about organ inferiority, the will to power and the role of society in personality development. This education and training balanced the characterological approaches of Lowen, Freud and Reich.

At this same time, Keleman began a personal mentorship with Nina Bull, a faculty member of Physicians and Surgeons Hospital, Columbia University and author of *Attitude Theory of Emotion*. He joined her on a research project that resulted in her book, *The Body and Its Mind*. Bull's social philosophy and neurological training established his neural-somatic model for emotions and goal-oriented behavior.

His inquiries then took him to Europe where he studied phenomenological and existentially oriented psychology. In Germany, he formed an association with Professor Karlfried von Dürckheim at the Center for Religious Studies. Dürckheim offered a depth and religious psychology that used the human form to reveal the relationship to the divine. These studies led to central emotional experiences that confirmed Keleman's concepts of the body as the center of one's self. They gave seed to the experiences that eventually led to Formative Psychology and Keleman's particular somatic-emotional methodology.

After returning to the United States in 1967, he moved to California where he interned at Esalen Institute in group dynamics and was exposed to humanistic psychology, the leading edge of psychology at that time. There, in an atmosphere of cultural revolution, he established his form of working bodily with emotional conflicts. The interaction with many leaders of the humanistic movement—Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, Alan Watts and others—provided a forum for his ideas. He met Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, and began a 15-year association, teaching an annual program in which they developed connections between the myth and the body.

Keleman has been the Director of the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California, since 1972, where he maintains a private and group practice and an active schedule of national and international professional programs. His Formative Psychology and somatic-emotional methodology rest firmly on an anatomical and physiological base, as well as a psychological and mythological understanding. His approach deals with the human condition in its societal and evolutionary thrust toward forming a personal somatic self.

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The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal

Editorial, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2007

What a wonderful way to inaugurate our second 5 years of publication: With a double issue devoted to the work of Stanley Keleman and his students, on the occasion of his 75th birthday.

For me, it began after the last USABP conference at which Stanley was honored with a lifetime achievement award. I had to leave early to attend my daughter's college graduation and missed the award ceremony. A few weeks later, I emailed Stanley and asked if he would like to submit something to the Journal. He didn't sound very interested but said he was working on a couple of things and might send them to me when they were finished. I waited. Finally two lovely pieces arrived and we started communicating about possibly publishing them. I suggested that if he had more unpublished works, we might publish more; maybe a complete issue devoted to his work. That is when he allowed as how he had heard that some of his European students were putting together a *festschrift* for his 75th birthday. I contacted Gerhard Zimmerman, one of the editors, who said they had in fact been wondering how to publish it. We decided to collaborate in choosing which articles might be appropriate for the Journal, and he agreed to co-edit this issue. He has been a fantastic collaborator, facilitating my extensive communications with the authors, etc. and often just being there at the other end of the internet or telephone.

So, Volume 6, #1 has been a delightfully collaborative effort, not only with my co-editor, but with many of the authors whose works were selected. I have learned a lot about, for example, German poetry and the meanings of "synesthesia." Virtually all of the contributors to this volume have submitted to at least one, if not two or more, editing of their work and numerous questions from me. A brief, but very interesting, email exchange frequency ensued.

An integral part of Formative Psychology has been the development of a language to describe some quite complex conceptualizations. Stanley has had to be linguistically innovative, finding and creating a language to express his insights. At times, I have definitely felt I was drowning in it (somewhat like the first time I took a graduate course entirely in a foreign language), but I intentionally did not grab on to the shelf of his other published works for illumination. I tried, for the most part, to confine myself to what will be available in this volume to make sure it would be accessible to those with no Formative Psychology background. To that end, we have included a Glossary, which I would strongly suggest you look over initially and refer to frequently.

Stanley's wide-ranging intellectual interests are somewhat but certainly not entirely represented in the wide range of both professional and non-professional practitioners of Formative Psychology. Doctors, lawyers, literary scholars practice Formative Psychology to one extent or another, as do the clinical psychotherapists who have contributed to this issue. It is intriguing to note that several of the clinicians have chosen to write about the use of this method in a personal crisis. Their professional approach and analyses make these personal narratives particularly incisive as they in most cases seamlessly meld subjectivity and objectivity, reminding us of another false dichotomy, the Cartesian mind-body split.

The original two articles eventually spawned three others, so we are fortunate to be able to lead off with five recent articles by Stanley Keleman as well as one reprinted from 1978. This gives us the flavor of his mature thought as well as some of his basic conceptualizations.

The following two articles are "memoirs." Sylvia Adler has constructed a memoir based on notes and journals of 35 years of association with Stanley Keleman. She chronicles the evolution of his thought, especially what is meant by Formative process. She elucidates Formative journal work and the Five-Step Process or How Exercise. It is followed by Clifford Goldenberg's brief account of making videos with Stanley since 1999.

The next six pieces integrate Formative Psychology with related fields of inquiry. Utilizing mainly German neuroscientific literature, Gerhard Zimmerman describes how the basic structures of the brain are utilized and affected in Formative Psychology, especially in voluntary muscular effort (VME). Characterizing Formative Psychology as an adaptive rather than a pathological model leading to individual differentiation and growth, Leila Cohn embarks upon a fascinating discussion of the neurological underpinnings of cortical-muscular selection. She sees Keleman's view of the body as "an emotional-anatomical continuum of many layers of organization whose architecture and way of functioning compound the human subjective experience."

Focusing on the role of the hands in the Formative process, Peter Löliger explores the implications of hand gestures from four vantage points: their phylogenetic and ontogenetic history, their neurophysiology, their psychological and philosophical implications, closing with several clinical vignettes. In "Formative Therapy with Clients Who Seek to Merge," Sylvia Adler delineates and explains the four somatic structures used in Formative Psychology and their changes in terminology since they were first introduced in *Emotional Anatomy*. In the course of preventing vasovagal collapse of patients undergoing minor surgery, Hubert Mossmann demonstrates that the effectiveness of the How Exercise is primarily due to its engagement of a cerebral feedback system. In another clinical application, Gine Dijkers-Lotgering offers a case history of the treatment of a person experiencing disruptive flashbacks of sexual abuse. And Tim Davis and Isabel Cosgrove have written a wonderfully clear integration of Chinese Medicine, Western medical concepts and Formative Psychology through the lens of a case history that is an example of truly integrative medicine.

Danielle Chauvelot's piece bridges the theoretical and clinical articles enumerated above, with the personal narratives in the next section. It is a lyrical, thoughtful account of work with her self, in a group, with clients and in the writing of this article. It is a step-by-step description of the four phases of her acquisition of Formative work, which she then applies to a personal issue at a transitional stage of life, and then her work with clients.

Five experienced psychotherapists offer personal narratives of their use of Formative methodology in their own lives...a testament to the depth of their experience with the work. Maggie McKenzie, a mature psychotherapist, recounts her confrontation with panic symptoms at the onset of the changes of menopause. Christina Loeffel Hickey, MFT, confronts the implications of Stanley's

statement that “the body is the unconscious.” Martha W. Knobler, MFT presents a nuanced, detailed description of a therapist’s personal use of Formative theory and practices in her continuing work with her autistic child in his developmental therapeutic program. Josephine Dahle describes how the discovery of an ectopic heartbeat challenges an experienced psychotherapist to befriend her body-mind in a new way, leading to personal life changes and resounding in treatment for patients. Carola Butscheid offers a description of her use of the voluntary muscular effort central to Formative Psychology to deepen and enrich her personal, differentiated stance in her post-menopausal years.

In *Soma and Its Production are Twins*, Irène Kummer elaborates a Formative approach to creating or encountering a work of art, illustrating the process with special attention to her specialty, German Romantic poetry. She thus aligns her analysis with two aspects of Stanley’s oeuvre only alluded to in other articles: His work as a visual artist (sculptor) and as a poet.

And finally, Terry Cooper and Jenner Roth, UKCP, two of the co-founders of Spectrum - a 30-year old psychotherapy center in London, explain their use of Formative Psychology to redefine an organizational crisis as a transition rather than a disaster.

A selected bibliography of published works by and about Stanley Keleman follows.

It has become a small tradition to do a volume once a year or so honoring a major figure in the development of body psychotherapy. The purpose of these volumes is to bring to the attention of the body psychotherapy community a body of literature they may not have previously investigated. I have tried to ensure that each volume contains both unpublished works of the honoree and works by students and colleagues based on the work of the originator. I really feel that this issue fulfills those goals with both theoretical and clinical material. Stanley Keleman’s obvious delight in what his students have written and the respect and affection in which he holds them (and they him, of course) have made this issue a deeply satisfying, deeply formative experience for the editor.

Jacqueline A. Carleton, PhD
New York
February 2007

In Honor of Stanley Keleman's 75th Birthday
The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal
Guest Editorial, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2007

This double issue intends to honor Stanley Keleman for his lifework. The articles of this volume are written by authors from three different continents and provide an overview of the comprehensive concept of Formative Psychology and its practical application in many different spheres of human existence. The topics are diverse and include personal narratives and case studies, as well as theoretical and lyrical approaches, to the field of Formative Psychology. There are also several exceptional articles written by Stanley himself. All contributions in this issue reflect the humanistic and evolutionary perspective that Formative Psychology offers to human existence.

In his books, *The Human Ground/Sexuality, Self and Survival* (1971) and *Your Body Speaks its Mind* (1975), Stanley Keleman introduced the basic principles of Formative Psychology. He has steadily cultivated the Formative concept into an encompassing philosophy of the body and continues to broaden and deepen applications of the methodology. Stanley creates a unique learning environment for his students and colleagues and supports unfailingly those who are committed to applying Formative principles. Formative Psychology is the result of more than 45 years of research, teaching and—above all—clinical work.

Formative Psychology emphasizes the influence of the body and the brain on each other and the organizing principle of expansion and contraction as the basis for self-regulation of human organisms. It offers a somatic methodology, which allows an individual to engage cognitive functions in a cooperative dialogue with the body in order to influence and differentiate thinking, feeling and personal experience. Feeling and personal experience are closely related to the shape and intensity of a behavior pattern that can be altered over time through the repetitive use of discrete cortical muscular effort.

As an experienced medical doctor working in the field of behavioral medicine, I can strongly confirm that Formative Psychology is not only highly effective in the treatment of anxiety and depression, it also offers excellent results in the treatment of psychosomatic and stress-related diseases such as eczema, asthma, chronic pain, eating disorders or tinnitus.

I wish all readers of this special issue many interesting and rewarding insights, and to you, Stanley, I wish you good health, happiness and many more fruitful years. Thank you very much for your outstanding teachings and your personal support as a colleague and friend.

Gerhard Zimmermann, MD
Mainz, Germany
January, 2007

A Biological Vision

Stanley Keleman

Abstract

This article, written almost 30 years ago for the first edition of *The Journal of Biological Experience*, illustrates the consistency of Stanley Keleman's vision of the human being as a biologically based organizing process. Making a clear distinction between a psychological approach and a biological approach, he lays the foundation for his current practice of somatic work, as well as for his ongoing pioneering efforts in creating a language and method based in the embodied reality of human existence.

Keywords

A Biological Vision – Human Forming – A Basis for Somatic Work

In this issue of the *Journal of Biological Experience*¹ I want to tell you about the development of my philosophy of human life as biological process. It is from this growing vision that my work has sprung, my books and the work I do with individuals and groups.

From my earliest days, I sought an image of mankind upon which to base my own life. There was in me a longing for an overview, and I pursued the ideas of various disciplines that attempted to answer the question of man's place in the universe. I was interested in psychology because it represented for me a hope for understanding the *elan vital* in man, and an ideal of who man could be. But I became dissatisfied with psychological descriptions of human activity that did not take into account the body, the soul, or man's destiny.

Because I had been trained in both the healing sciences and athletics, I was also attracted to those approaches that tried to understand the body as the basis of our existence and our satisfaction. The early notion I had, of course, using the language of the time, was "a healthy mind in a healthy body." Psychology had tried to say it the other way around: "a healthy mind makes a healthy body." By hindsight, I understand that my interest represented my future course. But, at the time, I was also dissatisfied with the option of the healthy body as it was generally used because it left out the idea of the person.

The situation I found myself in was that most people thought that either the mind dominated the body or the body dominated the mind. I was repelled by the attempts to reduce man to a materialistic event, and I was equally repelled by the metaphysical and idealistic notions of the body. We were more than a collection of particles in a pattern, I thought, and certainly more than the organization of impersonal energy fields or materializing entities infusing matter with life. W. Reich and A. Lowen had tried to work out a functional relationship of mind and body based upon a common energy source, but while this dialectical model was more acceptable to me than prevalent dualistic models, I was still dissatisfied.

The pursuit of this dissatisfaction eventually led me to grasp that experience itself would lead me to the conception I needed. Just as Einstein was required to reject the language of Newton, we must, I felt, reject both the mechanistic and spiritualistic languages concerning the body. We must develop a vision, a cosmology from our actual experience of living.

I experienced myself as a connected series of events that had a unity. I thought, I dreamed, I felt, I sexed, I got excited, I moved, I had concrete experiences and invisible ones. I had a hormonal existence, a muscular existence, a social existence. We have more than one body, I thought. When we go to sleep, we become the body of the dreamer. When we go to work, we become the body of the worker. In loving, we become the body of the lover. We are, at the same time, one body and many bodies. My life was composed of a multiplicity of excitatory experiences in which I formed myself.

This led me to the idea of the Formative process. I realized that, in my experiencing, I was continually organizing myself bodily, creating the shape and form of my life. I *was* the energetic process that organized the chain of experience, the chain of bodies I called me. People are constantly in the process of forming their bodies.

I realized that I was involved with the mystery of making a body. We are the development of a series of life shapes from childhood to adulthood, changing structures and qualities of experience. It could be seen embryologically, a series of bodies, connecting to each other, generating other bodies. Bodymaking generates more bodymaking, experiencing generates more experiencing. We are constantly changing the shape of our structure and the form of our experience.

Building upon these insights I was led to the notion of biological process. Seen outwardly, biological process is the development of the different bodies we have in our life time. Experienced inwardly, it is the different realms of our subjective life. It is the process we are, organizing ourselves, shaping ourselves, seeking satisfaction. It is manifested as all the events and experiences that make up our lives.

With this idea of biological process. I was no longer involved in a conception that split our experience into two realms. I could begin to talk about how persons form their world by their life activity, their gestures, their imagery and their feeling. This conception helped me to understand the Formative process, and this understanding led to a practical methodology of working with people. When I worked with someone emotionally, I now wanted to know what kind of life body, what kind of person was trying to shape. I wanted to know what the person was trying to satisfy, how desire sought satisfaction, how feeling became action or thought.

In the course of this work, I recognized that the human being is capable of many reorganizing, that we are more plastic, mobile and remoldable than we have been taught to believe. At the same time I was struck by the fact that life is situational, that

¹ This article is reprinted from *The Journal of Biological Experience: Studies in the Life of the Body*. Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer, 1978. Reprinted with permission of the author.

we live in a sea of constantly altering situations. We are presented with a stream of constantly changing internal and external realities, new desires, new people, new environmental conditions. I realized that a person capable of experiencing his process is also capable of being in these changing situations in a way that is not stereotyped.

Such an individual would be enabled to experience the situation he was in rather than an image he carried with him from the past. More importantly, he would be able to shape both himself and the situation, to make his world. He would be free from behavior that was obsolete for his survival and could reformulate the nature of his actions and images based upon his experiences. He would be capable of forming his life and his environment, of being flexible and responsible. And this would lead to increased possibilities for both survival and physical, emotional and intellectual satisfaction.

I now wanted to develop a language and a work that encouraged the growth of this kind of individual, a language and work that addressed the shaping of our experiences that spoke of transitions and biological processes. From this vision, my current work has generated itself.

Let me now take you through a story and a talk with my students that dramatize and concretize these abstractions. By the time you have finished this article, I hope you will have a good idea about what a work based upon the idea of biological process is and how it differs from other models of human existence.

As I was sitting in a public Jacuzzi pool one evening a woman psychologist who knows my reputation complained to me about a problem she was having swimming. She was having trouble breathing and speculated that the problem might be caused by emotional tension. This was alarming for her, because it had never happened previously. She believed the problem to be caused psychologically, by events in the mind. The mind affected the body. She added that she had been experiencing her conflicts more lately since she had been in therapy.

I responded by saying that, in my view, somatizing should be the goal of all therapy. The tension should be felt bodily because it arises as bodily conflict, later to be rationalized in symbolic images. Stress and anxiety are not events of the mind that somehow cause tension in the body. They are, rather, organismic patterns expressed as muscle and organ contraction.

The woman said that she was engaged in a kind of massage therapy in which she was now experiencing the contact her mother couldn't give her growing up. She was able to experience qualities evoked in her body, such as maternal touch, that brought her pleasure and contact.

"Yes," I replied, "Organismic learning is meant to give you your body. Conflict, tension is an organismic state, not simply a conflict of ideas in the brain. The body is, in fact, doing two or three things simultaneously, maintaining two or three opposing action patterns. Why you couldn't breathe was that one part of you that you didn't want to move or was frightened of moving, perhaps frightened of all the sensation that had been evoked in you while another part of you - your determination, your ideas - pushed you to move, to exercise."

In our next meeting at the pool, the woman said that she had understood my idea of conflictual action pattern states. But, she argued, these bodily states must be caused by something. Thoughts or images in the mind, she maintained, made feeling in the body, and these events give rise somehow to pain.

I told her that to speak in this fashion was to follow a way of conceiving our experience that was no longer useful. In my language, I use the term biological process. Our biological process includes what formerly we have called both mind and body, thought and feeling. Feeling, thinking, imaging and acting are all part of our biological process.

This idea is extremely useful when we think about how conflict is generated. Children have a need for stimulation through touch, for example. In a family whose members cannot support this need, or are positively hostile toward touching, there is both a pattern to reach out and the action to hold back from fear of harm or disappointment. The child does something that inhibits the movements of his or her desire, he or she squeezes the brain as well as the belly. The conflicts are not states of mind that somehow cause problems in the body. They are opposing patterns of the organism's actions which, when prolonged, become the source of pain.

The child perceives the bodily states of desire and the bodily stance of inhibition as muscle and organ pain. Then the brain perceives or recognizes that this is taking place. There is then a further distancing from the pain, and we believe that the perceived event in the brain is the real event.

Originally, the experience is of the total organism—muscle, brain, organs. Then the experience is localized in the recognition pattern of the brain. Traditional psychology has taken this one step further and developed methodologies such as free association, problem solving, or hypnagogic image releases that concentrate on mental functioning and ignore the rest of the somatic components in the conflictual situation. The goal of working biologically is to allow you to feel throughout your organism how you have enacted your desire or your inhibition. You are then enabled to develop new patterns that will bring you more satisfaction.

Having now made the distinction between a psychological and biological vision, I want to describe more fully the biological approach. To do this, I have transcribed a presentation I made to my students last year:

The goal of the work we do at the Center is to assist people in recognizing and developing an identity that comes from their own excitement, their emotionality, and their body's living process. Most people are totally identified with their social personality, their mental imagery. They are identified with the part of themselves that judges and controls their excitement and that strives to attain socially acceptable images they have introjected.

We teach persons to experience themselves bodily, to feel their lifestyle as a pattern of bodily shaping that permits certain kinds of excitation and prohibits others. When we say bodily, we don't mean to reduce the person to the materialistic, mechanistic body implied by contemporary science. Neither do we imply an occult vaporization. We mean the concrete experience of one's existence. We work on the ground floor of the instinctual life where there is no separation between biology and personality.

Through the use of somatic exercises you learn how you enact your desire and longing—whether for food, touch, sexual contact, or self-expression.

Working with yourself physically is working with your own desire. Working with the body is always working with the process of need as it seeks satisfaction. You begin to experience, in your body, the conflicts you may have around these issues. The Center's work is meant to help your body change itself, to live differently so that you can allow your emotional experience to reorganize your life.

At the heart of our concern is the cultivation of the ancient biological soup from which the currents of creation emerge. Excitement is a cosmological event, the fuel for the sun as well as cellular activity. The generation of energy, the transference of energy, on a biological or cosmological level, is the basis of existence. We can talk about it as the evolution of particles, the process of photosynthesis, or as cellular replication. We experience this in each of us as a primordial, nonverbal, excitatory process that gives rise to the tides of feeling, needs, vision, and actions, moving toward the world and away from the world, expanding and congealing itself.

The excitatory process is something we have in common, yet it is differentiated from person to person. Each person's excitation organizes differently, creating unique qualities by the ways it shapes itself. This notion is most basic: there is an excitatory pattern. Out of the currents of liquid, hormonal flows, ion exchanges, each person is formed. Excitation is structured differently by different people. You will see some persons with a high-pitched, gothic quality, others with a kind of intestinal, rhythmical lethargy. Some persons make consistently invasive, prickly contact while others shrink in fear whenever the excitement emerges in them. There are some people who exude a buoyant warmth, or a bright radiance.

Whatever I do with someone in terms of physical, social or energetic exercise, I am always seeking to perceive and to bring to the foreground whatever quality of excitement is present. I want the state and quality of the excitement to be experienced and expressed, to become part of the consciousness of the person. I may ask people to kick or breathe or reach out so they may better experience bodily their process of seeking satisfaction. We work physically to encourage, alter, bring out, intensify, and escalate the basic energetic metabolism to allow persons to experience somatically the movement of their desire. I may ask people to kick, jump with joy, breathe or reach out—not only to help them with emotional expression, but also to teach them how they can function with different levels of excitement.

Our excitatory process teaches us directly how we generate behavior that moves toward satisfaction or how we inhibit the movement of our excitation. People experience in their bodies both how they create various qualities and the possibility of alternate excitatory patterns. In the course of this work the source of people's knowledge of themselves changes. They are no longer identified with the memory of what other people have told them about themselves, or their analysis of their behavior. Instead their ability to recognize their own pattern of sensation and feeling becomes their self-reference. They begin to identify with a chain of somatic movements and events. The source of our knowing, then, is not in our memory or in our analytical powers, but in our biological life. The social personality which grows out of our somatic process begins to recognize that its nourishment comes from excitation and its fulfillment.

The psychobiological exercises that we do are an attempt to help the primordial ocean's own organizing tendency toward structure and satisfaction. We employ four kinds of exercises, each corresponding to different levels of biological organization and experience.

The first group of exercises is meant to develop and bring to the foreground the basic rhythmical states of the organism—vibration, pulsation, and streaming. These exercises are concerned with the movements of the basic excitatory processes—the intercellular movements of liquids, oxygenation, metabolism. We are concerned here with the cardio-vascular processes, pulse rate, breathing pattern, the flow of blood and lymph, the flow of excitation throughout the organism. We are concerned with increasing our perception of our basic rhythms. You could say that this group of exercises corresponds to the biological level of cellular function and survival.

On the next level are those exercises that consciously increase the instinctual movement of reaching out, of extending oneself. These movements carry the instinctual needs of sexuality and nurturing into the world. Carried along with them are the feelings generated by these needs, such as tenderness, urgency and anger. They are the basic movements of social contact and are concerned with both the survival of the organism and the survival of the species.

The third group of exercises allows you to experience the bodily form of your social roles and to develop these somatic roles more consciously. These are the attitudes by which we create our social interaction; roles such as wife, husband or student. Here we are interested in the bodily movements by which persons enact a particular quality in the family, in work situations, in learning. We are concerned with the bodily attitudes by which we learn how to control emotional over-reaction, how we learn to shape our environment with other people. These exercises correspond to the biological organization of culture. We could say they are concerned with sociological survival.

The last group consists of exercise meant to generate what can only be called biological religious movements. These exercises aim to promote the feelings of joy, wonder, awe, and presence that fills us with the meaning and fullness of life itself. They are concerned with encouraging and fostering those experiences of the body that bring deepness and radiance, a sense of connectedness or pool of existence that seems universal.

When we work biologically with a person, we evoke in that working racial remembrances, uterine experiences, childhood states. We evoke the history of the person with their parents, the way they have shaped themselves in their family, the history of how they have structured their excitation. We help you recognize a somatic pattern as something that you have developed through time and are now maintaining. When you begin to work, for example, you may have a rigid neck and not be aware of it. In our work you begin to find out how you make yourself rigid, how you sustain this pattern, how it served you in the past and how it

serves you in the present. Or perhaps as a child you were provoked to be inflammatory or learned to inflate your own excitatory process in order to gain attention. Now the question is how do you continue to maintain this process of over-excitation somatically as an adult? What kinds of satisfaction does it permit and what kinds does it prevent? Most importantly, we help you recognize these patterns as something you are doing, something you have created in the past and are maintaining in the present. They are not something done to you, rather something you have invented and perfected.

The exercises are meant to provide you with a feeling of what is going on with you emotionally and muscularly, to intensify what you are doing so that you can learn from your social pattern, and to generate a continuum of excitatory experiences different from the range you normally allow. It then becomes possible for you to invent ways to bring to an end a habitual state if you so desire. Changing your mental picture is neither enough nor is simply learning to relax. You must learn to function with a different excitatory level and to practice developing the social actions and movements that bring satisfaction.

The exercises we teach differ from those of other physical approaches that try to avoid the emotional instinctual issues or are only concerned with mechanical improvement. There are approaches that try to inflame you, to whip you up and exaggerate who you are. And there are those approaches that try to calm you, sedate you, relax you and diminish or destroy the desire process. There are people who try to work with the body in a non-emotional way. But to work biologically means to try to deal with all levels of responsiveness. The exercises we teach are not simply mechanical; good posture, for example, is the result of emotional satisfaction, just as a lively sense of movement and grace is the result of a love of life. From our perspective it makes no sense either to try and whip the excitatory process into some direction or to deny it. Contactfulness with the escalation of your excitement provokes desire and builds the boundaries of containment which create a human world. To be overwhelmed or to be underwhelmed—both are to misread the nature of desire.

Many of the other physical approaches mistake this. In their breathing and physical exercises, they attempt either to whip up desire or deny it. Some techniques lead to hyperventilation, overbreathing, which is an alkaloid state, leading to a high chaotic charge and convulsive emotionality. Other techniques lead to hypoventilation, underbreathing, an acidic state, with an emphasis on quietness, fantasy and decreasing contact with the world. For me, the deepening of desire is the urge to live; evolution and creation are statements of desire. Both hyperventilation and hypoventilation are counter to this—whipping the organism up to some level of “aliveness” or quieting the organism until it is still. Neither encourages the full range of responsive breathing—from the ecstasy of sexual arousal to the relaxation of deep sleep. In my view, the full range of breathing is related to social action; it cannot be encouraged without encouraging appropriate behavior. Cardiovascular exercises imply and, in fact, should demand a new lifestyle.

What we teach persons is how to live from their basic excitatory ocean, to recognize their inner vision, to experience and shape their emotion and their desire. We are concerned with how persons construct their bodies and their lifestyles.

This brings me to a second area of my work, the notion of process and form. When someone comes to work with me, they are in some kind of transition. Something in them is seeking to express itself, or they are in a process of changing their life. After many years of working with people in these emotional turning points, I have come to distinguish three phases of experience involved in any change. I call these phases endings, middle ground, and new forming. Each of these phases has distinct energetic qualities and unique bodily problems to be solved by the person going through them. Some people have difficulty ending situations even if the situation is harmful to them. Others have difficulty living through the period in which things are unformed, where they have left familiar old patterns and have not yet developed new ones. And other people have difficulty in shaping new values and committing themselves to perfectly new behavior.

The process of change always has these three phases. The first thing that happens in any change is an ending of a condition that has existed. The child does not simply begin a life as a baby, it first has to end the uterine life. Before embarking on a new lifestyle, a person must end the life he or she was formerly leading. The qualities which accompany the ending process include feelings of abandonment, letting go, accepting one's destiny, being finite, and a certain awe. One can no longer accept a particular way of life, a social situation. What he or she once identified with no longer works for him or her. He or she begins to feel that something must change, that a way of behaving must come to an end.

After we have ended something and before a new way of life has emerged occurs the second phase of the energetic process, which I call middle ground. I call it the “waiting room,” waiting for it to happen, waiting for it to come together. There is confusion, in that everything is up and down. When you and I are in that place, we are swimming in a sea of memories, sensation, disorientations, the past, the possible future, the now. The middle ground has qualities like life is bigger than us, a sense of being overwhelmed, a feeling that we are not masters of our own destiny, a sense that we exist without ego, an optimism, a struggle, and a hope. From out of the turmoil of middle ground, the waiting room, we develop the insights and the vision that permits the formation of new behavior.

When someone comes and sees me and says that something is dissatisfying in their life, or that they have problems that they can't resolve, I interpret that as this person is now beginning to end a way of life in an environment and they don't quite know how to do it. Or they need help in doing it, to get through the middle ground to the new place. There may be a fear of ending or there may be a conflict between ending and middle ground. But what they are saying when they enter the office is, “I've got to end the way I am using myself. This part of my bodily life is over and I need to organize a new bodily life.” With some of the exercises we do, we are facilitating the movement from endings to middle ground. We are going from order to disorder, from focused to unfocused, or we are trying to help the person live in the middle ground so that they can re-form themselves.

Our approach has two parts: the part in which you let something happen to you, and the part in which you participate in creating a different lifestyle. The first part involves coming into the office, engaging in the exercises, contacting the excitatory

process, learning how excitement wishes to form itself. The second part involves taking this out into the world. And this transformation is confusing for many people because they don't have the tools to make their private experiences public. We try to give them these tools. Most people are trying to generate an experience that they have had before rather than experience a new way of forming themselves.

The exercises we do in the office lead to working with oneself privately, and then taking this process into new interaction with others. A trap for people new to this work is to isolate themselves, to work with themselves solely on their own, and fail to bring it into the formation of a new community for themselves. You can be so independent in this work that you end up as a caricature of a person, incapable of any act of empathy or human sweetness. The goal of the exercises is not simply the generation of a particular feeling, rather it is the larger issue of how you use yourself.

So, each of us, as we enter the work, is either at endings, middle ground or new beginnings. We begin by looking at where we are in this process and that indicates the way of working with ourselves, of moving into what is forming. It is important that each stage be experienced. It is absolutely crazy while you are in middle ground to act as if you were developing new behavior. To focus on one's own process, rather than considering how one interacts with the other, is important at one stage of the process, for example. So that when you do reach out to make contact you are reaching out from your own excitatory soup and not from an old image of how you should reach out. It is equally crazy to ask - how do I stay with myself if I haven't created the space for myself by ending something or giving it up, or disorganizing it so I can allow the new formation to happen. Endings and middle ground are the surrendering of the present social self. New beginnings is the redevelopment of the social self. Something has to end, something has to form and then new behavior must be learned to accompany what wants to emerge. That is the process we teach.

The true issue of one's bodily life is the process of excitement, the way excitement gives satisfaction. In a certain way, the excitement and the desire are our teachers. Paying attention to your excitation brings you into contact with your body, brings you to your body's wish to live out its patterns of longing, its vision for itself.

The fundamental notion of the Center is that there is a basic excitatory process for all of us, that it goes through these stages: endings, middle ground, new beginnings. Our lives are lived in the qualities and shapes we form from this excitatory process. Working biologically assists us in contacting this process more deeply and discovering what wants to form in us. Any life situation then becomes an opportunity to experience ourselves, to plumb the shape of what is emerging, to participate in the creation of our excitation.

What is important is to learn how you do yourself in a situation. For example, in leaving my office you could ask how you do this, how you end the session. "How do I generate distance and leave? Well, I don't, I still feel Stanley and yet I walk away. So one part of me is there, another is gone." How do you do that physically, in terms of feeling, sensations, shapes? By asking this question you get somatic insights into how you use yourself. You may end the session with a really good feeling and then you can see how that feeling ends or goes away. Or you could ask how it feels in your body, muscles, brain, organs, to be waiting for the next session. What you experience in your breath, your emotion, your behavior. In our work together, I continually ask you how you do something, how you enact your excitation. This somatic questioning is meant to help you discover bodily, in your world, the process of your life.

In the end, you can only take what I teach and use it to discover your own process. The more you take our work together, work on your own, take it into the social world, record your experiences and how your process forms you, the more you learn from yourself. You literally become ever more deeply yourself.

Working biologically is more than the analysis of one's movements. It is more than the discovery of yourself or the expression of your feelings. It is, in fact, the shaping of yourself, your body, the living out of your process. In the past, we called this emotional and spiritual growth, the building of vision and character. To work biologically is to learn how to live your destiny.

The Methodology and Practice of Formative Psychology

Stanley Keleman

Abstract

The human soma learns about itself through the language of primary motility, an excitatory organization that has pulses of intensity and duration. The Formative process of shapes coming into being, forming and fading teaches us how to influence our individual shape; to grow, change and deepen our lives. When we learn to influence inherited or habitual behaviors, we are able to participate in the forces of creation.

Keywords

Body Shape – Formative Method – Voluntary Muscular Model

Life makes shapes. Life is an evolutionary development in which a series of shapes are continually forming. This shape making process creates anatomic structure that embodies emotions, thoughts and experiences. Our shape is our embodiment in the world. We are the body we inherit, the one that lives us; the social body, shaped by our community; and our personal body, the one we live and shape through voluntary effort.

Shapes manifest protoplasmic history. Molecules and cells organize into clusters, and these organize into layers, tubes, tunnels and pouches. These, in turn, become the complex tissue of organs, nerves, muscles, and brain and set the stage for embodied human consciousness. Through the act of living, our human shape grows, and is influenced by the challenges and stresses of life. This inherited process of changing shape can, to a degree, be voluntarily invoked and repeated. When we can modify by voluntary effort the shapes dictated by inheritance and social learning, we are creators of a personal world.

Formative Psychology is based in the process by which life continually forms the next series of shapes, from birth through maturity to old age. At conception each person is given a biological and emotional inheritance, but it is through voluntary effort that this constitutional given fulfills its potential for forming a personal life. Form gives rise to feeling. Over time, voluntary effort brings forth the existential truth of our own bodily experience as the basis for creating value and meaning in our life.

The methodology of Formative Psychology is voluntary muscular-cortical effort. It is a method based in a universal process of organizing and reorganizing shapes. When we voluntarily assemble the muscular pattern of a somatic emotional shape and then increase and decrease the intensity and duration in a measured sequence, we create variations in body shape, emotional behavior and patterns of thinking. This changing of shape by the increase and decrease of muscular intensity is a powerful engagement of our Formative process. It generates a pulsatory dialogue between muscle and cortex.

Communication from muscle to cortex and from cortex to muscle encourages the growth of new neural connections that generate increasingly complex dimensions of experiencing. These neural structures form patterns of sensory and emotional images that we experience as thinking. When these patterns have duration, they are experienced as memories.

When we change our internal anatomic structure by building new neural pathways, there is a shift in our body shape, a shift in how we are present in the world, a shift in our body's relationship to itself. The ability to influence our shape through increasingly subtle muscular-cortical differentiation is a skill we learn with practice over time.

The method of voluntary muscular-cortical effort mobilizes the body wall to make a series of distinct muscular shapes. First, there is the assembling of a muscular pattern. Next, increments of increasing pressure organize a compressing or stiffening of the muscular shape. Then a slow incremental disassembling of pressure allows the shape to become porous, and to swell. When the compressed structure is disassembled in this measured way and an expanding shape appears, it can be given an edge of containment by applying small doses of rigidity. Each effort to increase or decrease pressure creates a distinct somatic shape. These distinct shapes morph into one another and back again, giving rise to a continuum of connections and shapes—a pulsatory pattern that forms the basis for growing a personal adult.

The practice protocol consists of five steps:

1. Recognize a somatic pattern and make a muscular model of it.
2. Assemble a continuum of shapes by increasing muscular intensity, pausing between increments.
3. Disassemble the muscular pattern in distinct stages by decreasing intensity, pausing between each decrease.
4. Wait for a pulsing, swelling shape. Then give it an edge of rigidity to form a boundary to contain the pulse.
5. Give duration to new shapes and use them for social and personal activities.

Using the practice protocol of Formative Psychology, we can learn to grow the varied possibilities within our given structure. This is how we grow a personal soma with its own meaning and values, and a way to sustain and mature our adult life.

How to View the Body: A Formative Application of the Developmental Continuum

Stanley Keleman

Abstract:

The process of growing a mature adult body follows a developmental continuum of shape and behavior that is inherited and involuntary. When a person learns to use voluntary effort to influence anatomical shape, the process follows a Formative developmental continuum; voluntary participation becomes the basis of subjective experience and a personally formed adult.

Keywords

Body Shape – Developmental Continuum – Formative Continuum

My work and my interest is understanding how somatic shapes change over time. I have developed my approach and Formative methodology from observing the natural developmental processes of the body. The human soma is an ancestral genetic template replicating itself and forming individual, subtle variations. Each soma has an innate, instinctual urge to form the next stage of its existence by interacting with itself according to a developmental continuum of shapes that come into being, disassemble and reorganize. This involuntary, prepersonal process gives clues for how individuals can personalize their own forming.

In my teaching seminars and private practice I participate with people in discovering how their individual embodiment is organizing to fulfill its possibilities for a personal, mature adult. Whether a person is seeking help with a specific life dilemma or desires a deeper experiential and personal life, I approach each situation by asking which somatic shapes are here and which somatic shapes are trying to come into existence. I take into account the overall shape of the body and its tissue state as well as the emotional expression and subjective description from the client. Together we investigate which somatic-emotional shapes are present, which shapes are ending and which ones are seeking more form.

The Inherited Developmental Continuum

All behavior arises from anatomical structure. There is no behavior without anatomical structure, yet behavior can also influence structure. I am especially interested in how the organism interacts with itself—how it develops a relationship with itself to influence itself. Because shape *is* behavior, I use the terms shape and behavior interchangeably.

The natural evolutionary process of life makes shapes. These shapes follow a developmental continuum from simple to more complex and from more form to less form—from conception to birth to maturity to aging.

I use four behavioral organizations to describe the developmental continuum of how shapes come into being, change and reorganize. These organizations are motile, porous, rigid and dense. The movement from one organization to another along the continuum is fluid and pulsatory. The movement from one end of the continuum to the other is from highly motile to highly stable, from the least complex to the most complex.

The first organization, *motile*, is characterized by rapid change. Shapes are of the shortest duration and are the most unstable. Behaviors are mostly instinctual and involuntary and often difficult to voluntarily influence. We see motility in early cell division of the blastula or in fleeting ideas or dream images or in behavior that has mercurial changeability. A motile somatic shape is constantly shifting and changing, swinging between expansion and contraction, inflation and deflation. It communicates: I will be what is needed. Motile shapes are seeking porosity or rigidity.

In the second organization, *porous*, motility slows and shapes have somewhat more duration but there is not yet sufficient stability for structure to be reliably sustained. Boundaries are permeable and easily influenced by inside and outside pressures. The porous somatic shape is yielding and malleable, posture may be softly slouched, with loose muscles and joints that look akimbo or as if about to come unglued. It communicates: Support me, receive me. These shapes are seeking rigidity.

In the third organization, *rigid*, motility continues to decrease and there is more duration and stability. Shapes now have a firmer form that can be repeated and sustained over time. The rigid somatic shape is well formed and reliable. Muscles are taut, ready to spring into action. Posture has a vertical appearance of ramrod straight. Muscles can be very stiff or spastic and the range of expression is narrow. It communicates: I am ready to act, my way is the only way. These shapes are seeking porosity or density.

In the fourth organization, *dense*, motility is minimal. Structure is the most stable and has the longest duration. Dense shapes are layered and compact. They are slow to change and have the ability to sustain shape and hold form under pressure. The dense somatic organization is compressed like a coil. It can be hunkered down in a protective withdrawal. It can fluctuate between slow, deliberate expression and flashing eruption. It communicates: I move at my own pace; don't make demands. These shapes are seeking porosity or rigidity.

The Formative Developmental Continuum

The relationship of the organism with itself is for me the most important relationship. The use of voluntary muscular effort stimulates the participation of the cortex, and it is the ability of muscle and cortex to influence each other that enables the organism to form a voluntary personalized relationship with itself. The development of a personally formed adult is different from the growth of the inherited adult because of the voluntary participation in one's own forming. The learned ability to differentiate somatic shape is how we influence our anatomical inheritance and how we create complexity within ourselves. It is this ability for self-influence that insures the development of the personal adult.

When a person uses voluntary muscular effort to influence inherited behavior to personalize their embodiment, the process follows what I call the *Formative* developmental continuum. The ability to voluntarily influence a somatic shape by increasing and decreasing muscular intensity is also the ability to invoke the stages of dense, rigid, porous and motile. The *Formative* developmental continuum is distinguished from the *inherited* developmental continuum by the use of voluntary effort. The process by which shapes change form is the same. To voluntarily organize a somatic shape, to give it more form, more body, means to first muscularly organize density or rigidity. Differentiating a somatic shape by disassembling the muscular pattern in small steps means to invoke porosity and motility. Dense and rigid organization gives a somatic shape more form. This firmer shape can then be differentiated by invoking porosity and motility. The differentiated layers can be given more form by again invoking rigidity or density. This is the back and forth pulsatory process, by which shape and behavior develop layers and complexity. The *Formative* developmental continuum makes manifest the sequence of how somatic organizations can be voluntarily differentiated and reorganized into complex gradations of shape that give a person choices of behavior.

When a person uses voluntary muscular effort, the body is in a relationship with itself and is able to create a continuum of shapes. This developmental anatomical process is both simple and complex, predictable and novel, personal and universal. The ability to embody what is predictable and at the same time novel is what makes each person a somatic poetic sculpture. To understand the human soma as it struggles to live its dilemmas of forming an embodied existence is to comprehend its universal and individual organization. The ability to influence our shape is a source of personal power and satisfaction, and even happiness.

The Somatic Shapes of Depression

Stanley Keleman

Abstract

Depression is a response to excitatory overwhelm. It is a compacted bundle of reflex anatomic shapes that forms a continuum of behavior—helplessness, hopelessness, despair and resignation. These body shapes are part of an excitatory cascade that threatens to overwhelm the cortex. As the soma tries to diminish this threat, body shapes become rigid, dense, compacted; excitatory pulses in the brain become extremely inhibited; it is as if the cortex loses contact with the body. We call this state of understimulation depression. Overstimulation and excitatory explosion leading to inhibition and exhaustion are also called depression. Learning to influence reflex shapes allows us to differentiate compacted behaviors, minimize extremes and reinstitute self-management.

Keywords

Depression – Body Shape – Bundle of Somatic Shapes

Depression and the Formative Process

Depression brings about changes in body shape, organization and activity as well as changes in perception, feeling and subjective image. It is a somatic state that we adopt when faced with obstacles we cannot resolve. It can be a way to mask panic, anxiety, or conflict. Depression resembles hibernation, in which body processes slow and a person withdraws from contact. Because thinking and feeling are anatomic behaviors, depressive states can be changed through somatic intervention.

We are all conceived to be adults. From the moment of our conception, a universal, inherited biological program grows and forms our body. This forming is an organizing process, a continuum of pulsatory excitement that brings individual shapes into existence from conception to death. In my work, I am interested in how we can use the organizing process to grow a personal body and a personal world.

We live many shapes in our lifetime. The ability to influence our shape affects the quality of our daily existence. When we cannot influence our inner or outer worlds, we become depressed. Depression is a continuum of complex anatomic and emotional behaviors that accompany the body shapes of helplessness, hopelessness, despair and resignation. (see figure 1)

Almost fifty years of practice have taught me that the ability to create and manage our life, through voluntary participation in our organizing process, is a very powerful tool for living the varieties of our human experience. All our life we are undergoing change, and every day we have a chance to form ourselves and our relationships.

As I conceive of the Formative organizing process, pulses of excitement create a dialogue between the body and its brain. This pulsatory dialogue—especially the dialogue between muscle and cortex—not only makes order in the events of daily existence but also creates new behavior and new anatomic structure. The Formative method uses voluntary effort to create and vivify this dialogue. Using voluntary effort enables us to influence our somatic states and is an effective tool for self-management.

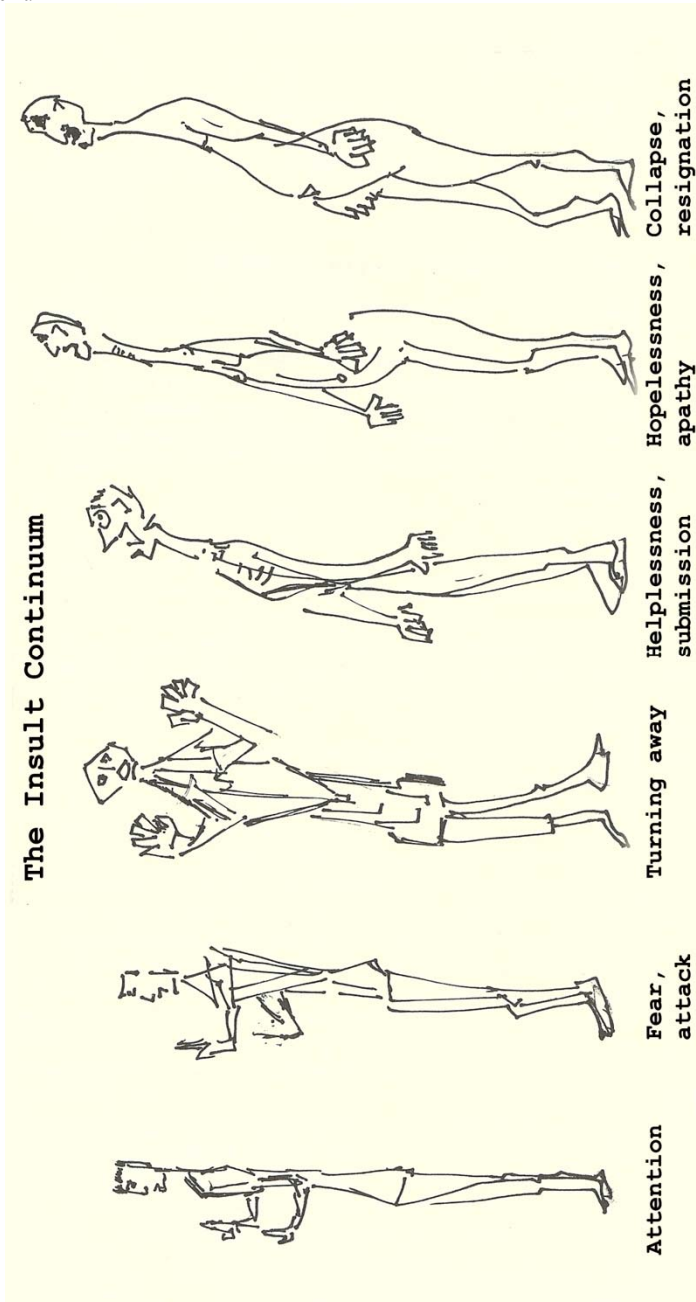


Figure 1

All behavior has an anatomic structure. As behavior is forming, assembling and disassembling, it goes through stages of motility, porosity, rigidity and density. When we learn to recognize these anatomic shapes and learn to influence behavior, we have a method for self-management. By increasing or decreasing the muscle tonus of a reflex shape or a body pattern, we heighten the excitatory dialogue of muscle and cortex. This seemingly simple practice is the key to growing and managing a personal somatic life. I call this method voluntary muscular-cortical effort.

Excitatory Overwhelm and Reflex Responses

When the organism experiences a great enough challenge, either from outside or from inside the body, there can be what I call excitatory overwhelm. Reflex responses are evoked that are intended to protect and maintain the integrity of the organism by shutting down or ejecting the excitement. The behavior that results from this attempt to mute the body's excitement manifests as a lack of responsiveness, but it is actually masking internal excitatory storms. Sometimes the excitement cannot be contained and there are emotional explosions followed by inhibition and exhaustion. Either way, when there is difficulty processing and managing excess excitement the relationship between the cortex and the rest of the body changes. The pulsatory dialogue is disrupted, and movement and expression are inhibited. We have difficulty forming responses and maintaining interpersonal bonds. Behavior may be muted and

responses diminished, or behavior may be overactive and spill out all over. The body's reflex patterns to shut down or eject excitatory overwhelm create the behavior that we recognize as depression.

Depression as a Bundle of Reflex Somatic Shapes

When stress reaches a certain level of intensity, it becomes an insult. When this happens, metabolic activity increases. The first reflex response to increased excitation is to still and stiffen the muscles of the body wall—to investigate in preparation for fight or flight. If this response does not diminish the excitation, the body responds along the continuum of reflex shapes of helplessness, hopelessness, apathy and resignation. When the body wall is rigidified, movement and expression are inhibited. The ability of the soma to differentiate experience and expression is restricted. When the body wall is profoundly dense, the pulse pattern of the body is compressed, and the soma is even less responsive and more withdrawn. Or the opposite may occur: when there is not enough muscular tonus, the body wall is too porous and excitement cannot be contained; it leaks or pours out. Rigid and dense shapes also have the capacity to eject excitation by exploding. All of these reflex patterns lead to apathy and resignation.

All the body shapes along the reflex continuum influence the functioning of the cortex; we may have trouble thinking, expressing emotions, and forming appropriate social behaviors. We may act withdrawn, apathetic, or helpless; or we may act manic, or attack or flee. When the stress is unremitting, these somatic shapes solidify into a compacted bundle of shapes and behaviors. This compacted bundle can be difficult to influence or unpack.

Depression diminishes the excitatory pulsation and growth of the cortex, allowing inherited reflex patterns of behavior to dominate. Important body patterns, sensory and emotional contact, expressions of affection, all atrophy from disuse. When the dialogue of excitement between the cortex and rest of the body is greatly diminished, there is a kind of cortical senescence. When we can learn to influence and vivify the pulses of excitement, we have the ability to reinstitute the dialogue between muscle and brain. We are empowered to modify and manage our behavior.

The Continuum of the Shapes of Depression

The four shapes and behaviors that I look for when working with depression are (1) motility, overexcitement; (2) rigidity, too much form; (3) porosity, diffuseness; (4) density, compacting. These somatic shapes and patterns of behavior that make up depression have a profound effect on the cortex. The motile shape floods the cortex with excitement; the porous shape diffuses excitement; the rigid shape channels and localizes excitement; the dense shape seeks to shut down excitement. Altering any of these somatic shapes by voluntary muscular-cortical effort alters the state of the cortex and thereby alters experience and behavior.

Each shape in the bundle of shapes that form the depressive pattern has its own function and its own associated feelings. Each shape in the continuum has its turn to dominate and narrow the focus of cortical activity. If any shape becomes habitual, it sets the behavioral mood and cognitive orientation. Because these reflex shapes are compacted and bundled, it may be difficult to distinguish among them. Voluntary muscular-cortical effort helps to make the shapes more distinct, and more readily available to be influenced.

The Motile Shape

The motile shape is always in flux; it lacks stability and duration. The urgency to give form to excitement keeps boundaries under constant pressure. Shape must change or excitement disperses. Motility is seen in embryological development, the cradle of developing form. Many motile adults are like contortionists, able to change behavioral shape easily. The extreme behavior of motility can be mania or hysteria.

The Rigid Shape

The rigid shape is stiff and generally very firm or even hard. Boundaries contain and compartmentalize excitement. Rigidity enables people to control their actions and feelings. Rigid people appear reserved, compulsively busy, self-occupied. Ritualizing behavior gives these people a sense of power. In the extreme, rigidity can be like a spasm—painful muscularly, emotionally and mentally. Because rigid people avoid the experience of porosity and motility, they have difficulty being intimate or spontaneous.

The Porous Shape

The porous shape is malleable and inclusive. It has a low muscular tonus, but can also have a semi-rigid organization. The porous shape has a slow organizing pattern, with rounded peaks of excitement that dim responses and can lead to lethargy or depression. Boundaries have limited firmness and duration; excitement leaks into the environment. Porous people find it difficult to hold their boundaries for very long; they tend to be receptive and accommodating. Their bonding pattern is to blend and merge.

The Dense Shape

The dense shape is the end phase of the developmental continuum. It gives stability and duration. When the body of a dense person is compacted and squeezed into an unresponsive and impenetrable mass, there is little in, little out. This compacting of the dense shape is not rigidity; it is a hyperplasia, a thickening of the tissue. The powerful dense shape generates an internal pressure that gives the body the appearance of hunkering down to preserve and protect. Although it has the capacity for explosion, the reflex shape of density is more toward a slowdown, shutdown pattern where pulsations are flattened and the body cannot easily expand. The dense person has difficulty integrating motor and emotional expression. The effect of density mimics cortical senescence. Dense shapes are clinging, squeezing; they dampen arousal patterns and discourage differentiated and situational expression. The over dense shape has a shrunken somatic existence that is experienced as suffering.

The Relationship between Motility and Density, Porosity and Rigidity

Fear and anxiety are motile, overactive, excitatory processes. When excitement rises to the level of inflammation, the experience is panic. Surging excitement is a hot and invasive force that breaks boundaries. Fearing that it will be invaded or overwhelmed by its own excitement, the soma tries to minimize the excitement by ejecting it. We see highly motile behaviors such as flailing, crying and screaming. Sometimes the soma has the opposite response of trying to contain the excitement by becoming rigid, immobile, silent and catatonic.

When the threat of overwhelm does not diminish, the body compacts into a dense restraining structure. This dense structure creates a powerful interior pressure that, for a time, contains the excitement and protects the cortex from further excitatory storms. At this point, motility and density have either a cooperative or a conflicting relationship. The excitation of over motility, with its urge to flood and the effort of density to hold back are most commonly at war, and we see behavior that swings between motility and density.

A cooperative relationship between motility and density can be encouraged by learning to differentiate the intensity of either the motile or dense shape. Making variations in the layers of density gives the shape some porosity. This porosity can be formed into self-contact and intimacy. Gradations of density also give structure and duration to motility. Giving some density to the body wall contains motile movement and curtails the process of continual emptying. When some degree of rigidity is given to porous form, it modifies the leaking of excitement and produces a sense of identity. Influencing the intensity and duration of motile-rigid and porous-dense shapes creates layers of differentiation that encourage self-management.

Using Voluntary Muscular-Cortical Effort to Influence Depression

A Formative view orients us toward the changing of anatomic shape, toward forming a new gestalt from a present shape. The use of voluntary muscular-cortical effort is a developed skill that mobilizes the ability of the cortex to alter shape and give expression to excitement. Voluntary muscular-cortical effort can help to manage unstable or over stable shapes. With practice, we can learn to identify muscular patterns, and then to assemble and disassemble them by organizing different levels of muscular intensity.

When I use voluntary muscular-cortical effort to work with people, I ask them to show me an anatomic shape by organizing a present motor pattern. I might ask them, for example, to organize and intensify the muscular pattern of grabbing the throat, squeezing the eyes, or compressing the chest—all these patterns are meant to prevent or control excitatory storms. A shape that has been voluntarily organized can be voluntarily disorganized. By practicing increasing and decreasing muscular intensity of a reflex shape or a habitual emotional pattern, we learn to differentiate our body shapes and to form alternatives to behavioral extremes.

The ability to experience a body shape and to make muscular distinctions within it, empowers us to make order of and meaning from our experiences. Cortical functioning is intensified, and the forming process is affirmed. Over time we can learn to make fine distinctions in a motor pattern. As we learn to use voluntary muscular-cortical effort to influence excessive responses, we experience the possibilities of self-influence and have a different contact with ourselves and others.

Depression literally squeezes us out of our world. The ability to differentiate the somatic shapes of depression is how we grow new neuromuscular connections and generate new feelings, images and thoughts. When we disorganize thick and unresponsive shapes, we have the potential to assemble a different shape, a different pulse pattern. As we learn to organize, disorganize and reorganize patterns of behavior, we become a responsive person, with a different life potential, a different future. Using voluntary muscular-cortical effort to influence anatomic shapes and reflex patterns, we are empowered to differentiate and reorganize our somatic shapes and to continue growing and forming our personal adult. This is the basis of optimism.

Dreams and the Body

Stanley Keleman

Abstract

Dreams arise from our cellular depths and are the ways we speak to ourselves. They inform us about what is seeking to be embodied in the awake world of daily living. Working formatively with our dreams is key to the growth and development of a personal world.¹

Keywords

Dreams and the Body – Dream – Embodying Dream Figure

Dreams are a product of our body process. They generate information about the soma's relationship with itself and about its developmental journey from infancy to adult, from maturity to aging and fading away. They give us the opportunity to participate in the forming of the shapes and stages of our evolutionary development.

Dreams are anatomical events, pulsatory signals that are a chemical, electrical, protein-making process. They become a chain of excitatory communications from the body to the cortex, from the cortex to the body and from the cortex to the cortex. A dream is an anatomical dialogue between the body that is and the body that will be.

The body is dreaming about itself, its state and its development. Pictorial and sensorial images organized by the cortex are signals, communications that permit us to recognize and respond to our forming process. The dream experience arising from our body process is a call by the body to reorganize, to give more form and stability to that which is wanting to come into existence. Dreams show us the shapes that are seeking to disorganize and the shapes that are seeking to form.

The dream is a morphing anatomical drama, a dialogue between the brain stem that regulates our instinctual behavior and the cortex that regulates the voluntary organization of personal behavior. Waves of excitement reach out from the brainstem through the limbic system, through the thalamic pathway into the cortex. When these waves of excitation arouse the cortex, there is stimulation of neural pathways that travel within the cortex and back to the muscles and organs. The excitation is highly motile, it swells and peaks, becomes porous and diffuse. These excitatory states are the soma's developmental process seeking stability.

We experience motility and instability of excitation as fleeting images and sensations. When structure is unstable and porous, we have unstable and porous memories of our dreams. When structure has more stability, we have enduring memories. If excitation is of high enough intensity or long enough duration, the growth of new neural tissue will begin forming new connections and structures. We give stability to excitation that is fleeting and unstable by using the Formative method of voluntary muscular-cortical effort to give more and less form to a remembered shape from the dream.

The Formative method is based in the developmental evolutionary principle that shapes change form to incorporate experience. The dream and its figures offer a focus for us to participate in this universal forming process. The dream figure is a localized, highly motile, excitatory organization of information that is unstable. When we use voluntary muscular-cortical effort to organize the muscular shape of a dream figure, we give some stability and duration to motile excitement and we stimulate the cortex to make neural maps of the motor patterns. By repeating the effort of increasing and decreasing the muscular intensity of the shape, we are making layers of differentiation in a larger pattern of behavior and growing more complex neural maps in the cortex. Anatomical structures are created that become the basis of self-reference. Practicing the organization of behavior adds layers of complexity to our personal self. Our internal library of experience is enriched, and we have more choices of behavior and feeling.

Using voluntary muscular-cortical effort to work with a dream stimulates a brainstem-muscular-cortical dialogue. Over time, this anatomical dialogue gives stability to structures and increases the ability to voluntarily repeat behavior. There is a difference between having an experience and being able to repeat an experience. The ability to repeat the organization of a behavior gives more stability to structure, and it is this stable structure that we recognize as memory.

It is important to remember that the formation of anatomic structure *is* the organization of memory. To give stability to transitory excitement is to create new structures and new memories. Synaptogenesis occurs, creating structures that have never existed before. When we voluntarily participate in the forming of new anatomical structure, we are at the heart of the process of self-creation, the forming of our personal somatic self. Over time, we learn to grow a Formative relationship with the adult we inherit - the adult we are living, and the one we are forming.

I will briefly illustrate how I use the Formative method to work with a person and their dream. The body and its experience is always the reference. I am not interested in symbolic analogy or meaning. The protocol is to tell the dream in terms of experience rather than pictorial images; to organize the muscular shape of a human figure from the dream and then to increase and decrease the intensity of the muscular pattern. I look for transitional shapes in the dream figures. New form always starts with an ending because this is the nature of change. What shape is ending? What shape is seeking more form?

A powerful, dense, mesomorphic person tells a dream in which he is shrinking and making himself small and impenetrable.

¹ For this article I have selected from the opening talk of my annual program, Dreams and the Body, held in Berkeley, California, and in Solingen, Germany, in the Spring of 2006. In this talk I describe how dreams reveal our soma's innate forming urge and how to use the Formative method to participate in the development of a complex personal body.

SK: Tell me your dream.

Dreamer: I dream of gathering myself, of compressing myself. In my dream I am silent, sad, and resigned. I try to be a happy prisoner.

SK: Tell me the dream experience again and organize the muscular shape of your dream figure.

Dreamer: I am in a compressed silence. I experience myself pressuring myself and keeping my responses quiet. I am smiling a compressed smile. I am making myself small. It is familiar, a way to know me.

He shows me the shape of shrinking. He is clenching his fists and jaw; his torso is narrowed and compressed.

SK: Intensify this shape in three stages, minimum, medium and maximum.

A person makes a relationship between what is forming and what is ending by increasing and decreasing the intensity of the shape of a dream figure.

Dreamer: As I assemble the compression I feel sad, then mad, and finally at the maximum level, I feel resigned. As I disassemble my compression, I feel myself swelling, my hands and arms are wider apart. I experience this place of less pressuring as a diffuse, porous shape. It bothers me. I want to compress again. It's automatic. Compression gives me a sense of safety, a sense of me.

SK: I have a suggestion to help you differentiate the experience of compression. Wrap your hand around a closed fist and increase the pressure in three steps. Notice how you experience the variations of intensity. Disassemble in three steps. Repeat the sequence slowly until you notice how your experience spreads from the hands to the arms, to the torso, and finally to the brain.

Using the hands to experience compression evokes the general principle that a localized expression influences the whole pattern. When a person learns to use the hand and the fist to influence a local pattern of compression, this experience of influencing compression can be transferred to the whole body.

Dreamer: When I undo the compression there is softening, my hands are cupped and I sense this is a gathering, containing gesture.

SK: Keep this shape of gathering and containing, stiffen it a tiny bit with micro muscular rigidity. This gives firmness to the act of containing and minimizes the act of compression. Begin to use micro increments of muscular rigidity to make each step distinct and to minimize the urge to automatically engage compression. Notice the effort to sustain the distinct shape of containing. If you experience the urge to compress, intensify the compression a little bit then disassemble it. This gives density a porous layer.

Dreamer: I have a different experience of density when I follow your instructions. Changing the intensity of my density gives me choices. When I use my maximum, medium and minimum effort, it helps me feel myself. If the disassembling shape is too porous or diffuse it bothers me. When I give it some firmness, it pulses and I can contain it. Feeling this pulse fills me with myself. Knowing I can repeat the undoing of the compression and contain the porous shape gives me confidence that this personal me has duration. I contain a different me. I feel happy. I could get used to this.

Using the Formative method with dreams is a practical application of Darwin's conception of developmental evolution, which illustrates how organic life changes shape to embody its experiences over time. Throughout our lifetime, we are continuously changing shape according to an inherited plan. The ability to influence our inherited body and to grow a personal body is the gift of the human cortex. From the body comes the dream. From the body comes the ability to use muscle and cortex. Using voluntary muscular-cortical effort to influence our inherited body is how our soma participates in its universal and individual forming process to create shapes and behaviors that have not existed before. With practice and commitment, we can learn the skills of living and personalizing the cycles of our embodiment with vitality and emotional truth.

The Human Story: Forming a Personal World

Stanley Keleman

Abstract

Our bodies are formed by a universal inherited process of shape-making that generates and organizes its own information. Human subjectivity is the experience of our interior anatomic structure. The ability to influence inherited behaviors is how we grow a personal somatic life. Using voluntary effort to influence our shape is a way to have some freedom in choosing how we live our embodied destiny.

Keywords

Voluntary Muscular Effort – Somatic Self Knowing – Personalizing Our Embodiment

From a Formative view, something is always ending, beginning, blooming and fading in us. Cycles of birthing, maturing, deepening, aging and dying are processes that go on all our lives. From conception, we are continually bathed in prepersonal processes, the inherited programs for forming our bodies. Our task as humans is to individualize and personalize coming into being, blooming and fading at the various stages of our bodied existence.

With practice, we can learn to have some influence in our inherited process. This ability to influence inherited behaviors is how we grow a personal somatic life. As we share with others the forming and reorganizing of the personal world, we shed light into the prepersonal unknown.

The simple yet complex truth of the universal Formative process is that shapes fade and new shapes appear. This basic life process of changing shapes is the ground floor for understanding how our world is perpetuated and differentiated, how it begins and ends. The growing and changing of our individual somatic shape is how all of us live the universal process of coming into being and fading away. The gift of the human cortex, the center of creativity and intentional action, makes it possible for us to learn to participate in the changing of our somatic shapes; in the blooming and fading of our individual lives. Using voluntary effort to influence shape, emotion and thinking, enables us to form a personal life and a personal world.

The inherited human body is a prepersonal organization that is formed from the interior of the biosphere. The biosphere has patterns of excitement that become organized into anatomic structures. Our body develops as a series of processes that include the ability for self-reflection and self-influence. We can learn to identify and recreate, muscularly, a body shape or pattern. Then begin to differentiate and influence our shape by making variations in the intensity and duration of this muscular pattern.

The cell membrane, as a primary boundary that defines an inside and an outside, is the analog of how our body makes boundaries—boundaries that are capable of creating multiple layers of differentiation. We can learn to use voluntary effort to vivify inside and outside surfaces. We learn to make boundaries by incrementally increasing and decreasing the muscular intensity of a body shape. This ability to differentiate body shape and patterns of behavior enables us to grow a personal adult—with our own feelings and thoughts, our own intuitive notions, our own rationality and poetic fabrications of ourselves and the world. The greater the differentiation of shape, the greater the choice for variation in behavior.

Czeslaw Milosz, the Nobel Laureate poet, was interested in writing about the experiences of the fading of our existence. He wrote that all that is necessary to justify existence is to describe existence. I would take that further; I would say it is worthwhile to participate in forming our existence. To be engaged in the forming of our experience, the changing of our somatic and emotional shape, to grow and manage a personal world and to articulate our experience in words or expressions—all these require voluntary effort. This effort is more than description—it is somatic behavior.

Self-influence through voluntary effort opens the door to our generative and imaginative interior. Our body is the theatre where we form characters with their own sensorial and logical facts and their own motoric, intuitive, poetic experiences. This internal dimension expands the world inside our skin, and supports the inventing and reshaping of behavior, feeling and meaning. Over time, using voluntary effort, we can build a personal internal anatomic architecture. We experience this personal anatomic architecture as an internal dimension of human knowing. By forming our somatic interior, we do as D.H. Lawrence urges: We build our ship of death to carry us to the other side. When we do this, we personalize our life and death.

The hero of Saul Bellow's novel, *Ravelstein*, speaks of a man who felt instinctively that everyone has an embodied destiny, a destiny that takes effort to live. This embodied destiny—the soma's cycles of expansion and contraction, blooming and fading that form the essential plot of the human story, can be influenced by voluntary effort. Most Americans, Bellow points out, want to cut loose from the social mooring of birth to create a new image of themselves, an image of their own devising. Phillip Roth speaks of the human urge to form an alternative destiny that repudiates the past and persuades us toward a new interiority. These statements are, to my mind, insights into how we, as living organisms form, govern, and invent our lives. When we learn to participate with the universal Formative process, we can have an individual voice that influences our growing, maturing and dying.

Our life, as William Shakespeare said, "is a play within a play." The inherited body and the personally formed body are the play within the play that everyone lives. The inherited adult and the voluntarily formed adult—each a distinct presence in the world—play their parts in the narrative of embodied existence. We are all individual and collective subjects engaged in forming a human world of shared concerns for living and dying.

Glossary of Formative Concepts (1996-2006)

Andrew Gootnick, PhD

Abstract

Formative Psychology is an original and complex system developed by Stanley Keleman. It offers a conceptual and experiential framework for understanding how the adult human soma grows and develops. Its main concern is how individuals can learn to influence their genetic inheritance to grow an individuated personal somatic self. In his teaching and writing, Stanley has given language to concepts, experiences and behaviors that can be difficult to articulate. I have compiled this glossary over a period of 10 years (1996-2006), with the intent to give short definitions to his fundamental concepts as they have developed over time.

Keywords

Stanley Keleman – Formative Psychology – Conceptual Framework

Alpha Adult and Second Adult

The Alpha Adult refers to the full grown adult somatic form that is influenced more by genetic inheritance than by voluntary muscular effort (VME). The Second Adult is strongly influenced by their use of VME to develop more differentiated and non-programmed behavior.

Bodying, To Body (used as a verb)

Refers to the use of VME in creating anatomic shapes. To body ourselves is how we voluntarily participate in creating a personal anatomic structure. This process perpetuates experience through the formation of new synaptic connections.

The Bodying Practice, How Exercise

A practical experiential protocol that uses VME to influence somatic structure and behavior. Synonyms for this protocol are: The How Method, How-To Exercise, Five-Step Exercise, Somatic Practice and Somatic-Emotional Method. The Bodying Practice has been explained by Stanley Keleman in his book *Embodying Experience* (1987). Its latest rendition appears in this journal, in Keleman's article "The Methodology and Practice of Formative Psychology."

Body Types

Constitutional types, based on embryonic cell layers (ectoderm, mesoderm and endoderm), that differentiate into three general bodily functions: Nervous system/skin (ectomorphic), muscle/bone connective tissue (mesomorphic) and digestive system/organs (endomorph). Stanley Keleman has brought a Formative framework to the constitutional theory of psychologist William Sheldon, who postulated a connection between body type and temperament in 1942.

Body Wall

The sheath of muscle that covers the body and serves as a boundary between our inside and outside worlds. Its function as a boundary is essential for forming an identity.

Boundary

An anatomical structure that defines an inside and an outside, and acts to regulate what enters and exits.

Containment

The ability to organize a membrane, a boundary for the expansion and contraction of excitatory pulsations.

Cortical influence

Neural communication from the cortex with the rest of the body.

Developmental continuum

The sequence that all anatomical shapes follow as they go from less form to more form. The developmental sequence is: motile → porous → rigid → dense

Embodied, Embodiment

As a fact of nature, all human life is bodied. To embody one's life, however, one must voluntarily participate in the creation of one's personal somatic shape.

Excitation

Bio-electrical current that connects structures and fuels the behavior of these structures.

Formative Psychology

The application of Darwin's principles of how shapes change over time. It is concerned with how individuals form themselves and their world. It teaches individuals how to influence their behavior and experience.

Formative Process

How anatomical shapes change over time, and how these changes influence experience and behavior. Can refer to involuntary forming or voluntary forming.

Formative Method

A protocol for influencing shape and behavior through VME.

Frame and Map

Frame refers to creating a muscular model of a behavior. The purpose is to hold still a motor action and give definition to a pattern of behavior. Map refers to the neural activity of motor behavior. The interaction between a muscular frame and a neural map is the link between behavior and cognition.

Layers, Sub-Organizations

Small muscular changes that make distinct shapes within a larger anatomical shape or pattern of behavior.

Personal Emotional Reality

The body-based subjective experience of one's internal emotional state and of the external world, distinct from the shared consensual reality of society.

Pulsation

The fundamental characteristic of living material to expand and contract. This can be a single pulse or a continuum of ongoing pulses. On the human level, expansion is reaching out, giving, contraction is gathering back, receiving.

Somatic

Bodily; physical; from the Greek word "*soma*," meaning "body."

Somatic Organization

The complex patterns of feelings and expressions that are bodily organized for dealing with life situations.

Somatic Psychology

A psychology grounded in human biological and anatomical process. It studies the evolution of human body shape and the subjective experiences that accompany these changes in body structure over a lifetime.

Somatic Reality

The inner emotional truth that emanates from our biological state, from our basic bodily experiences.

Somatic Shape

The body shapes and experiences that are the physical and emotional foundation for a person's sense of identity and self-reference.

Somatic Self

The organism's inherited bodily organization, sometimes called the natural self.

Personal Somatic Self

The organism uses VME to influence the natural self. This process creates individuated somatic shapes and personal behaviors that are not inherited.

Somatic-Emotional Work

An anatomically based therapeutic and educational approach that addresses life dilemmas in the context of bodily experience, including feeling, emotion, cognition and imagination. Its purpose is to empower the individual to grow a more subjective and personal life.

Startle/Stress Continuum

Reflex behavior that are a response to emergency situations, but can become habitual somatic shapes. The continuum ranges from investigation (startle, caution) → bracing (dislike) → rigidity (aversion, fear) → spasticity (freezing) → withdrawal (submission) → collapse (resignation) → fragmentation (dissolution).

For more information, see http://centerpress.com/articles/the_continuum.html

Voluntary Muscular Effort, VME

Voluntary muscular effort develops from the involuntary reflex act of muscular inhibition. VME is the basis of how we learn to voluntarily stop or hold still an action that is in progress. It is also how we learn to make variation in our inherited shapes and behaviors.

Voluntary Muscular-Cortical Effort, VMCE

The influence of muscle action speaking to the cortical structures, and the influence of the cortical-neural structures speaking to the muscles; now used interchangeably with VME.

Biography

Andrew Gootnick, PhD, is a Licensed Psychologist with private practices in San Rafael and Berkeley, California. He has been associated with the work of Stanley Keleman and the Center for Energetic Studies since 1978. A practitioner and teacher of psychotherapy for more than 30 years, he uses the principles and methods of Formative Psychology in his work with individuals and couples. Address correspondence to: 1000 Fifth Avenue, Suite 5, San Rafael, CA 94901 USA. Email: andrewnet@earthlink.net

Learning From and Collaborating With Stanley Keleman Recollections From the Early Days

Sylvia Adler, MSS, LCSW

Abstract

In this article, the author shares some of her experiences with Stanley Keleman and with learning and practicing Formative work. She begins by describing her first meeting with Stanley. Next, she describes two early workshops: The one in which Stanley first presented fundamental insights into the Formative Process, and the one in which he introduced the How Exercise. She goes on to describe two of the Family Body programs that Stanley and she later conducted. Finally, she describes a few of her own observations and impressions concerning Stanley's use of himself.

Keywords

Somatic Psychotherapy – Formative Psychology – Stanley Keleman
Personal Growth Groups – Family Body Work

I have known Stanley Keleman for 34 years. At the time I met him, I was disillusioned with psychoanalysis, and I was seeking an alternative approach and guidance in how to strengthen and grow myself. I attended my first Keleman workshop at the urging of friends. Shortly after I attended that workshop, I became part of a circle around Stanley that included professional students and people from many walks of life, eager to learn about his vision of the life of the body. Ever since then, I have been closely associated with Stanley's continuously evolving body of work, as a student, as a teacher and as a collaborator in forming the Family Body approach.

When I began to write this article, I dug up my old notebooks and journals. As I read them over, I was once again reminded of the special magic of the early workshops, so I decided to make those workshops the focus of this article. My notes refreshed my memories considerably and have enabled me to reconstruct and portray exactly when the Formative process became central to Stanley's understanding of the life of the body and how he first presented his thinking about it; his introduction and use of Formative journal work; his introduction of the five-step process of Formative work, the How Exercise.

Of course, learning from a great teacher involves learning much that is less tangible than the content of concepts and the rules of techniques. Stanley has always conducted experiential groups, and I have often been present during his one-to-one work with group participants. In this context, I have learned a great deal by observing the enormous range and skill of his applications of Formative principles and the How methodology to help participants elicit and form new possibilities for themselves. Stanley's charged interactions with provocative group members have also taught me a lot. To convey something of this dimension of my learning experiences, I offer a few observations and impressions about Stanley's use of himself.

First Encounter

It was in 1972, shortly after I moved to San Francisco from Chicago, that I first heard about Stanley Keleman's body-oriented work. At that time I was exploring some of the new approaches in personal growth work that were proliferating as part of the Human Potential movement. Several people whose opinions I valued urged me to go to a Keleman workshop; they could not praise him enough. I stayed up all night one night reading *Sexuality, Self & Survival* (Keleman, 1971), and attended my first Keleman workshop that summer.

Limited to 16 participants, the workshop took place over 2 days in a comfortable house in the Berkeley hills. We sat on pillows surrounding a mattress, listening to Stanley's interchanges with group members who sought his help with various personal issues. The member would be asked to stand and walk around a bit while Stanley studied his or her structure. Then the member would be asked to engage in some kind of physical movement, often while lying on the mattress. The connections between the person's presenting issue and what he or she had been asked to do were not always clear to me. My background as a clinical social worker and family therapist, and as a former psychoanalytic patient, offered only limited guidance as I struggled to understand what was going on. I did recognize that something powerful was happening. I was experiencing a high level of visceral excitement and a wide range of emotional responses as I listened and observed. I sensed that other group members were having a similar experience, and at some point I realized that each person's physicalizing of his or her situation was setting the stage for, and evoking the expression of, the next person's issue. My own work in this workshop remains vivid—partly because it was my first experience with Stanley and partly because I was in a personal crisis at the time. Starting my life over again in California was proving to be more daunting than I had anticipated, and my coping resources were wearing thin. Also, I felt intimidated by the seeming sophistication of the other participants in the group. So at the same time that I was experiencing an increasingly urgent need to reach out for help, I was unable to summon up my speaking voice—I literally could not open my mouth and ask to work. Finally, to my surprise and relief, Stanley recognized my silent distress and invited me to explore my state with him. My intensely constricted throat quickly became the focus of the work.

Looking back now, after 34 years, I understand much better than I did then what happened next, and the nature of Stanley's interventions. First, he instructed me to externalize and enact my self-strangulation by strangling a towel; then he had me gradually do that less. This freed up my voice, but I still needed further help in how to use myself bodily to form a personal expression of asking for help. Growing up in a family where self-reliance and not-needing were highly valued, I had learned all too well how to stifle myself. However, I hardly knew how to use myself to express a need (although, paradoxically, I was able to serve as an advocate for others). In this first powerful experience in my personal somatic education, Stanley began to teach me two things: How to influence what I did know how to do (an extreme form of self-inhibition), and how to form a bodily expression of what I did not know how to do.

In retrospect, I recognize that Stanley was already applying a number of Formative principles in this work with me. First, the principle of always beginning with the person's existing pattern of self-use, and having the person embody that pattern more intensely, so that an enhanced template is formed, which can then be influenced by the deliberate exercise of voluntary effort. Second, the principle that recognizes that when an ingrained pattern of self-use is modified, the body does not know what to do next; another behavior must be deliberately formed and practiced. And third, the principle that recognizes that relief, and the beginning of real transformation, come when a person, with another person's help, begins to do something for himself or herself.

Milestones in the Development of Formative Psychology

Is there one thing in the known universe that is not subject to the law of evolution?

— Jack London, *Martin Eden*

After this first experience of working with Stanley, I wanted more. I attended another two-day workshop and began having private sessions. However, I was a practicing psychotherapist and, before long, I decided to study with Stanley, in the hope of bringing bodily perspectives into my professional practice. From Fall 1972 through Spring 1973, I attended a series of one-day professional tutorials. Here I found myself part of a loose circle of interesting people, all devoted to learning from Stanley. I think we all recognized that he possessed great wisdom about the life of the body, and wisdom about how to help ourselves and for others to connect with themselves bodily and emotionally. I also recognized that, at the ground floor, in myself was a deep hunger to feel more alive, a hunger to expand my ability to behave more as an actor than as a reactor in my own life.

In reviewing my notes from these early programs, I see that Stanley was already talking about the Formative process of all animate life, and that he saw this Formative process as the basic structuring force of human life. For example, in my notes from the tutorial on May 19, 1973, I wrote: "What a person is forming (the tending toward) is one of the deepest ongoing events in his life. The Formative process can be facilitated or inhibited but cannot be stopped." And again: "Think of yourself as a process, rather than as a body or a mind."

In subsequent programs, it became abundantly clear that Darwinian evolutionary theory influenced Stanley's thinking about the life of the body. The evolutionary principle that shapes change over time is the basis for Stanley's assertion that our bodies change shape over time, and that the shape of the body can be influenced by voluntary effort. By the early 1970s, Stanley's work already focused on encouraging what can be, rather than on restoring what was damaged or lost.

Because Stanley was an early member of Alexander Lowen's Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis, and was one of its senior trainers until 1970, he continued to be considered a bioenergetic therapist long past the time when the term was appropriate to describe his work. In fact, many other significant influences contributed to Stanley's anatomic-emotional approach. To begin with, there was his early chiropractic training, which gave him an extensive education in human anatomy. This was followed by his private practice as a chiropractor in New York, where he saw many patients from the Broadway theater world and was able to learn a great deal about how people used their bodies in singing, dancing and acting. Nina Bull, a lay researcher who directed a Research Project for the Study of Motor Attitudes at the Psychiatric Institute in New York City, and who is best known for her Attitude Theory of Emotion, was a mentor and a personal friend. Stanley often credits her with giving him a creative and profound understanding of the social implications of neurology. Karlfried Graf von Dürckheim, founder of the Center for Initiation and Religious Studies, was also a mentor who gave Stanley a deeper understanding of the value of subjective experience. A later, but also very important, influence was Joseph Campbell. Over a 10-year period, he and Stanley did personal growth workshops together and charted new territory in the relationship between anatomy and mythology.

I would say that by the early 1970s, Stanley's vision of the life of the body, and his techniques of somatic work, had progressed to a level of distinction such that his body of work stood on its own. However, it was a body of work without a name of its own; it was known simply as somatic-emotional work, I believe until the early 1990s, when it was christened Formative Psychology.

Following are descriptions of two early ground-breaking programs in the history of the Formative approach.

"The Body as the Living Expression of the Formative Principle," October 8-12, 1973

This 5-day residential program was held at the Westerbeke Ranch, in Sonoma, California. Here for the first time Stanley made the Formative process the central focus of the group. He spoke of our living in a continuous field and being always in the continuum of our lives. He said that being in the Now does not exclude the past or the future. We did an exercise that consisted of taking a memory and stretching it out to its past and future. Our focus during the week was to establish, in both narrative and embodied form, where we were in our lives at present, so that we could learn what we were tending toward and could participate in our own formativeness.

This was also the first workshop in which participants were asked to keep a journal. This enabled them to do a great deal of work on their own, to take the lead in helping themselves, and to generate a larger frame of reference for themselves. In our journals, we addressed fundamental questions about our lives. These questions were always connected to how we used ourselves bodily and emotionally and were designed to further the process of developing an embodied ego. Our Formative journal work was also the springboard for working one-to-one with Stanley in group sessions.

We were directed to pay great attention to our subjective experiences of excitement—how our excitement peaked and flattened, and how our excitatory processes were fundamental to the way in which we left one world and created another.

Here are some of the evocative, Formative questions that we worked with:

- Where do you perceive yourself to be at this stage of your existence, in both your inner and outer worlds?
- What are important stepping-stones—events that led to this place in your life?
- What is your relationship to your body?
- What is the image you have of yourself that you polish? What do you suppress and repress of yourself in the service of that image? Can you identify how you enact these processes physically?
- What do you experience yourself as tending toward?

In the closing session of the workshop, we each dealt with the question: what have I formed of myself this week, and what am I tending toward?

“The Life of the Body,” July 1-19, 1974

This 3-week program, the first of Stanley’s annual Summer Institutes, was held at the University of California, Berkeley and was attended by about 45 participants. A number of other body-oriented therapists besides Stanley conducted sessions, and I was one of the people recruited to serve as a small-group facilitator. These small groups met regularly; in them, participants could express and deal with their confusion regarding the conceptual material and the exercises. They could also share their bodily experiences during the group exercises, and receive acknowledgement and support from other small-group members.

Our conceptual frame of reference in this program was the Formative process, which Stanley now described as having three phases: Endings, Middle Ground and New Form. Each week of the program, and its attendant exercises, emphasized a different phase. We began with the question, “What is Ending for you?” Our focus was on learning how we responded bodily to both large and small endings and turning points in our lives, and on how we could voluntarily influence our process. For example, we worked with how we ended being merged with our parents on the way to forming a private, unshared part of ourselves.

In the second week of the program, the focus was on experiences in Middle Ground, the place of less form that we find ourselves in when something has ended or is ending, whether we choose to end it or not. We called this “being in the soup.” We learned how we functioned when we were in a relatively unformed state, with the globalness, the increase in excitation, and the expansiveness of this state, which for many people may be quite threatening. Our question here was, How do you handle yourself in the Sea of Creation?

In the final week of the program, we focused on self-gathering, helping ourselves to make more form and experimenting with new forms of self-expression. We explored stances of being the fool and being the knower; we learned how to “sing our own song.”

It was in this program that Stanley first introduced the How Exercise, or Five-Step Process, the ritual that translates Stanley’s understanding of the Formative process into a series of steps that people can use to voluntarily influence how they function. The How Exercise remains the core methodology of Formative work. It is much easier now for Stanley and others who do Formative work, myself included, to guide novices through the exercise. But when we first tried to do this exercise at the 1974 Summer Institute, it was amazingly difficult to get what Stanley was after. The experience was something like grappling with a Zen koan. This may have been because people were generally attuned to focusing on what they experienced (for example, “I’m a tense person”) rather than on the how of their experience (“How do you make the tension?”).

In this introduction to the How Exercise, Stanley had a standard response to people who volunteered to talk about their process in the group. He would interrupt these people to ask how they were doing whatever they were talking about. The interchange might begin something like this:

Woman Participant: I’m a very insecure person...My mother was very hard on me, and my father was basically absent. I do grounding exercises to help myself.

Stanley: How do you make the insecurity?

Participant: (long pause)...Very anxiously.

Stanley: How do you make the anxiety?

Participant: (long pause)...It just comes whenever I’m with a person in authority,

Stanley: Is the insecurity here now?

Participant: Yes!

Stanley: Can you experience how you’re lifting and bracing your chest and holding your breath as you talk to me?

Participant: Oh!

Stanley: How do you lift your chest?

Participant: (appears to be thinking)

Stanley: You’ll never be able to figure it out. You need to do the movement.

Participant: (intensifies bracing her chest) Oh, I can feel that I’m stiffening my upper body.

Another example:

Participant: I'm too much of a good boy.

Stanley: How do you make your good boy?

Participant: (long pause)...By inhibiting myself.

Stanley: How do you inhibit yourself?

Participant: (long pause)...By not breathing deeply?

Stanley: How do you do that?

Participant: (long pause)...By raising my shoulders and tightening my belly.

It seemed as if the How questions could go on indefinitely. Eventually, it became clear that one could not answer the questions by consulting one's ideas about oneself. The answers could come only from the direct experience of one's process. It became apparent that the value of doing the How Exercise lay in the broadening and deepening of one's experience and one's behavior, not in finding answers. The person who was going on the journey with Stanley was entering ever more deeply into the somatic-emotional organization of a fundamental aspect of his or her way of being in the world. In so doing, the person was learning experientially how to participate in his or her own Formative process.

Throughout this 3-week program, we deepened our connections to ourselves bodily, becoming more intimate with our patterns in the different phases of the Formative process. We also did self-drawings—pictures of our bodily somatic-emotional attitudes, which we called somagrams—and Formative journal work. I found my experiences in this group enormously enriching, both personally and in the way they developed my ability to bring bodily perspectives into my own clinical work.

The Family Body

From early on, Stanley was deeply interested in family process, in working with the ways in which family dynamics and experiences influence how people form and use themselves. In 1974, he invited me to co-lead a professional group where he could apply his biological vision to family work. The idea was that I would offer psychosocial perspectives to complement his observations and insights. In 1975, we co-led an experiential personal growth group. By this time, I was experienced in working with the How Exercise, and I was ready to join Stanley in working somatically with people who were exploring family roles.

"The Family Body," January 29-March 5, 1974

The program consisted of six 4-hour sessions, held once a week over a 6-week period. The workshop announcement read: "This workshop is for exploring how our physical selves are formed by family roles. We will look at two family bodies in the group to explore their dynamics from this perspective." Actually, we were fortunate to have three families agree to participate in live sessions in front of the group. At the end of each session, the family would leave, and the group would discuss what had transpired and what we could learn from these family bodies. Stanley focused on the character structure of individual family members, suggesting linkages between, for example, a mother's collapsed chest and her inability to support her own assertions when she dealt with her recalcitrant husband. He was opening a window into a whole new level of understanding, and relating to, family process for me and the other therapists in the group. I had to expand my understanding of families as psychosocial systems and reconcile it with this new approach—looking at families and individual family members as bodies. It was a challenge that I willingly took on.

"Individuality and Community," March 15-June 14, 1975

This experiential group met once a week over a 3-month period, beginning and ending with an all-day session. Stanley began by asking participants to make two somagrams—a large drawing of their family of origin and a self-drawing. Then he asked them to do journal work, addressing the following questions:

What role did you play in your family of origin and what role do you generally play in a family situation or group now? What did you want to be, but could not be, in your family? For example, did you want to be angry, or sexual, or assertive? What did you want supported by your family that was not supported? Who in your family did you feel blocked by? Or is there a situation in your family that blocks you?

At this point, participants worked on their own, making their somagrams and writing in their journals. They were also asked to physically mimic their somatic stance in various family scenarios—for example, when faced with a disappointed parent. This was the beginning process of making connections between their family images and stories and the physicality of family life and family roles. Next, we asked the participants to organize themselves into subgroups consisting of five or more members each. These subgroups would remain their "families" throughout the program. Within each family, members chose their own roles, but they also negotiated with each other about certain roles—if a member wanted someone to play her older sister, for example, and no one had chosen this role. Then these simulated families began to role-play various scenarios. Stanley and I visited each family, simply observing at first, and eventually intervening.

It quickly became apparent to us that these constructed family roles, and the role-playing interactions, created an intense interpersonal environment, which we later dubbed a co-bodying field. Within this environment, each person's character structure and

characterological issues revealed themselves. We used a variety of strategies to help people connect bodily with the way they functioned in their roles, and to influence how they functioned. One strategy was to stop the role playing abruptly and have participants freeze-frame their stances, using the How steps first to intensify and then to de-intensify their shapes. So, for example, a man playing an intimidating father might begin to experience how he both stiffened and inflated himself, and how he could deflate and soften this shape, enabling him to relate differently to the man playing his rebellious son. Many group members found it easy to make connections between the shapes they assumed in their simulated family and how they functioned in the real relationships in their lives.

Another powerful strategy was to have participants talk to their families about the way they experienced the role they had assumed, and then exaggerate the physical organization of the role. The other members of the family would then imitate the person's stance, generating a kind of somatic hall of mirrors. When the stances were taken down, a rich nonjudgmental sharing of experiences ensued. A third strategy was to have family members give each member nonjudgmental feedback about their somatic experience of that member's stance. For example, "I notice that I become agitated and pull back when you reach out to me." Of course, this feedback is equally useful to the person offering it.

After everyone had participated in the family role playing, much direct characterological work could be done. For example, group members could identify the role that they habitually played in family conflicts—provoker, initiator, avoider and so on; then work could be done on how they organized themselves bodily in these roles. We also called their attention to other aspects of their experiences in their family roles. These included how they participated in rejection interactions, and how they managed themselves when desperate about certain impulses that they were determined to control around others. We asked each person to identify the feeling that he or she must generate in order to feel contact, exploring how the person used him or herself to evoke this feeling.

In the many years since we co-led these two programs, Stanley and I have continued to do Family Body work—together and separately, in group settings and in clinical practice. We have published articles on the Family Body (Schmidt [Adler], 1979; Schmidt [Adler], 1981; Keleman & Adler, 2001). Currently we are preparing a comprehensive anthology of lectures and articles on the Family Body.

Co-leading with Stanley was always tremendously challenging for me, and it was not necessarily easy for him. Energetically, we were not well matched, and of course, he was the conceptual visionary and a sophisticated somatic practitioner, while I, for a long time, was a beginning student. But it has been a Formative partnership, and the creative rewards have always outweighed the difficulties.

Stanley's Use of Himself

Stanley has a dominating presence and has always been very charismatic. He was only 40 years old when I met him, but he seemed older, probably because he bore himself with authority, like someone with a great deal of life experience. It is still common for people to be at least somewhat intimidated by the range and depth of Stanley's knowledge of anatomy and physiology, as well as by his deep understanding of all aspects of the life of the body. High-spirited, exciting, alive, unpredictable, a distinct authority figure, as well as someone capable of great empathy and tenderness, Stanley has always been a natural magnet for intense transference projections, both positive and negative.

On the Human Potential workshop circuits of the 1970s and 1980s, Stanley had a reputation as a "force to be reckoned with." Sometimes, this seemed to attract people who were looking for a strong person to pick fights with. He did not put up with participants who acted out in his groups, and he could be quite intimidating when seriously challenged, evoking the Brooklyn street fighter of his youth. He did not want the ethos of emotional catharsis and dramatic "breakthroughs" so prevalent in personal growth groups to permeate his workshops and would set firm limits on anyone who seemed to be moving in this direction. Sometimes, in the early workshops, he allowed himself to respond emotionally to camouflaged provokers and other people wearing the various guises of negativity. New students are often surprised by his confrontations with direct and indirect hostility. Personally, I have always found it refreshing and illuminating to experience a group leader willing to show many sides of himself, and I consider Stanley a model of emotional expressiveness. He has also always been a model of someone who works on himself and uses his own work to grow himself.

Of course, the vast majority of Stanley's interactions with participants in his groups have been free of conflict, and these interactions too have taught me a great deal. His capacity to be present with another human being is remarkable; his somatic intuition awe inspiring. I have never forgotten my own experience of meeting Stanley and feeling that I was really being seen by another person for perhaps the first time in my life.

As a family friend, I have experienced directly Stanley's strong commitment to family and family participation. He and Gail were married for more than 30 years and raised two daughters together. When Gail died, Stanley became a model for someone going through the grieving process, and the ensuing processes of reorganizing family and other important connections.

Over the years, Stanley has shown me and others how we can live the stages of our lives, from the Alpha shape to the mature and Second Adult into the late Adult. He has shared a great deal in his writing and teaching, and by how he lives his life, influencing and forming his own process.

Concluding Remarks

In concluding this memoir, I want to share a recent dream and the story of my work with it.

I dream that I am with my ex-husband. We stand close together, and I experience a strong physical relationship between us and a warm, intimate feeling. I'm a little edgy, though, because I know it's time for us to separate—he has a plane to catch and I need to be somewhere else. But he clings to me in a very insistent way and won't let go, until finally I wrench away and push him back.

Now I am on the upper floor of a hotel, trying to catch an elevator to go down to the ground floor. The elevator stops several times, but the doors close before I can get on. I become more and more frustrated. Another woman arrives on the scene. She finds a back door into the elevator. In the blink of an eye, she opens it and gets on, slamming the door shut in my face. Now I'm really angry, but I also feel helpless.

I wake up.

A few hours later, feeling frustrated with the task I am doing, I remember the dream and decide to work with it. I assume the stance of my angry, frustrated, helpless self and hold my intensification of the stance for a long time. I feel as if I'm back in the dream, continuously being shut out of the elevator. Gradually, I work with softening the pose. As I disorganize my posture, pulsing waves of excitement fill me. I use myself to make a shape of containing this liquidity and as I do, inside myself, I hear Stanley's voice saying, "you are a wave." I recognize that the place I was shut out of was myself, and now I am in myself. I taste the experience of my own pulsating being and recognize that I am no longer angry or helpless, and I know that I will be able to deal with the task at hand. Once again, I am filled with wonder and gratitude to my great teacher, who has led me to the gift of my own aliveness and Formative capacities, and has helped me to share this gift with many others.

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Biography

Sylvia Adler, MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist specializing in Formative work who practices in Berkeley, California. She holds a master's degree in clinical social work from Smith College (1956). A cofounder of the Family Institute of Chicago, she is a longtime practitioner and teacher of family and individual therapy. Email: adlersylvia@yahoo.com

Learning to Swim with Stanley: A Formative Collaboration

Clifford Goldenberg, MS, MFT

Abstract

The author discusses the Formative process as it applies to his creative collaboration with Stanley Keleman.

Keywords

Formative – Creative Process – Porosity

A number of years ago, Stanley asked me if I wanted to help him make videos that would be used to teach people how to see from a Formative perspective and would simultaneously make a visual statement of how Stanley views the life process. As a Formative therapist myself, with no experience making videos, I agreed to embark on this creative journey with Stanley. This voyage proved remarkable as much for the actual documents we have produced as for the extraordinary things I have learned about the creative/Formative process and the nature of collaboration.

When we are in the midst of creating these videos, we enter a semi porous state in which ideas and possibilities are explored in a non-linear shape. The exchange of ideas and the creative attempt to translate them into visuals expands our imagination and we find extraordinary ways to stretch the limits of the video editing equipment we use to embody Stanley's vision. The process takes hundreds of hours of phone calls, conversations and experiments to produce videos of no more than 15 minutes duration.

While Stanley is a sea creature, perfectly at home in his own creative ocean, I am a land lubber who appreciates the depth of others' art but have rarely ventured into the depths of my own creative impulses. Stanley has artfully guided me in the ability to swim inside myself even when I wanted to stubbornly cling to the rocks I call home. As I am chiefly responsible for the technical side of our endeavor, I tend to want to solidify our ideas quickly. Stanley has taught me the necessity of letting things remain liquid long enough for possibilities to emerge and to let things gel slowly. This mimics the Formative process of the body in which the organism goes through stages of porosity, motility, rigidity and density. As we rigidify our experiments into a storyboard and ultimately settle on a sequence, the less formed becomes more formed and the video becomes itself.

And despite my love of land, it isn't long before I am eager to dive into the next project.

Biography

Clifford Goldenberg, MS, MFT, is a Formative therapist in private practice at the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California. He has collaborated with Stanley Keleman in producing 15 videos about Formative Psychology since 1999.

The Neurobiology of Somatic Emotional Learning and Formative Psychology

Gerhard Zimmermann, MD

Experience is not what happens to you; it's what you do with what happens to you.
— Aldous Huxley

Abstract

This article describes the basic brain structures that are involved in somatic-emotional learning and how neural brain activity and emotional behavior patterns can be influenced and differentiated through the practice of Formative Psychology, a somatic methodology developed by Stanley Keleman.

Keywords

Neurobiology – Formative Psychology – Voluntary Muscular Effort – Somatic-Emotional Exercises

Neural Networks

In the last two decades, neurobiological research has considerably altered our understanding of the brain and its capacity for lifelong emotional growth and learning. The brain responds flexibly to changing internal and external environments by continuously reorganizing itself and the body. There is a constant dialogue between the cortex, the limbic system and other parts of the brain and between the body and the brain. The basic structure of the brain is modular and behavior patterns are organized by neural networks or maps. A neural map represents a specific event or behavior. In a neural map, the information from different areas of the brain is connected to a complex excitation pattern. Frequently used patterns increase their performance by heightening the ability of the involved neurons to fire. With repetition, a pattern can be activated with increasingly less sensory information. Fragments of sensory information may be sufficient to trigger an already established excitation pattern. Neural adaptation, strengthened synaptic connections and the growth of new synapses and neurons stabilize a neural map. Somatic learning requires a neural reorganization. This process is called neural plasticity.

The Cortex

The most complex patterns of brain activity are organized in the cortex. These include learning, remembering, planning, problem solving, awareness and the execution of differentiated responses to the world. On the level of motor behavior, the cortex differentiates voluntary behavior from pulsatory involuntary reflex actions. All these functions culminate in the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is located in front of the premotor and motor areas of the frontal lobes and does not reach full maturity until the third decade of life. The orbitofrontal cortex is located above the orbits of the eyes. It is involved in the process of decision making. Another specialized cortical area is the insular cortex. It produces an emotionally relevant context for thoughts and body sensations and plays an important role in the experience of pain.

In the brain, certain functions are partly lateralized. The right cortical hemisphere predominantly processes emotionally related content. In the left cortical hemisphere, linguistic and causal understanding is prevalent. Although the brain has a modular organization, it integrates separate incoming signals into a unified pattern of behavior.

Mirror Neurons

Watching an action and actually performing an action activates corresponding neural networks. This phenomenon is facilitated by so-called mirror neurons, which are motor neurons. They are involved in the planning and in the simulation of an action as a preparation to act. Mirror neurons also participate in the process of imitation learning. They not only respond to another person's action but also to the intention behind the action. It is assumed that the mirror neurons are the biological basis for direct action understanding and for the ability to read the emotional states of others. Additionally, the capacity to empathize with others is facilitated by the mirror neurons. They establish an empathetic experiential link between agent and observer by creating a similar shared neural state. This has been experientially demonstrated in humans referring to the patterns of disgust and pain. All this implies that having empathy for another person, and understanding his emotions and behavior, is a neural motor process.

The Limbic System

The part of the brain that plays an important role in the organization of memory and in the regulation of emotional behavior is called the limbic system. It is also referred to as the emotional brain and is a ring-like structure surrounding the brainstem. The limbic system includes certain edges of the cortex and structures of the interbrain such as the thalamus, the hippocampus, the amygdala and the basal ganglia. The thalamus acts as a relay and determines which stimuli reach consciousness. The hippocampus is involved in storing and retrieving explicit memories and is therefore a key brain structure in learning. The amygdala is essential for decoding emotions and, in particular, decoding stimuli that are a threat to the organism. Motor memory, located in the basal ganglia and the cerebellum, is the basis of all emotional motor behavior. Emotional limbic circuits have less neural plasticity than the more cognitive cortical patterns. Therefore, the relearning of emotional behavior usually requires more time and practice.

The right orbitofrontal cortex has an important function in the dialogue between the limbic system, the autonomic nervous system and the frontal lobe. This pathway is particularly affected by challenges and high levels of stress. When excitation and stress hormones flood the brain, the prefrontal cortex has difficulty in calming and quieting the limbic system. Additionally, the function of self-perception, which is associated with an activation of the superior frontal gyrus, is lessened. A person who experiences continuous stress may gradually lose his ability to distinctly perceive physical or mental overload. In the case of severe patterns of alarm and helplessness, the consequences often are a diminished cortical-limbic function including cell damage of the hippocampus and the onset of disease.

Cortical-Limbic Dialogue

The cortical-limbic dialogue organizes and differentiates somatic emotional behavior. Within this dialogue, the frontal lobes plan, organize and finally execute motor activities. To complete an action, implicit subcortical structures have to contribute the corresponding motor and emotional behavior. This is shown in figure 1. Therefore, somatic emotional behaviors arise from a mixture of explicit and implicit brain functions.

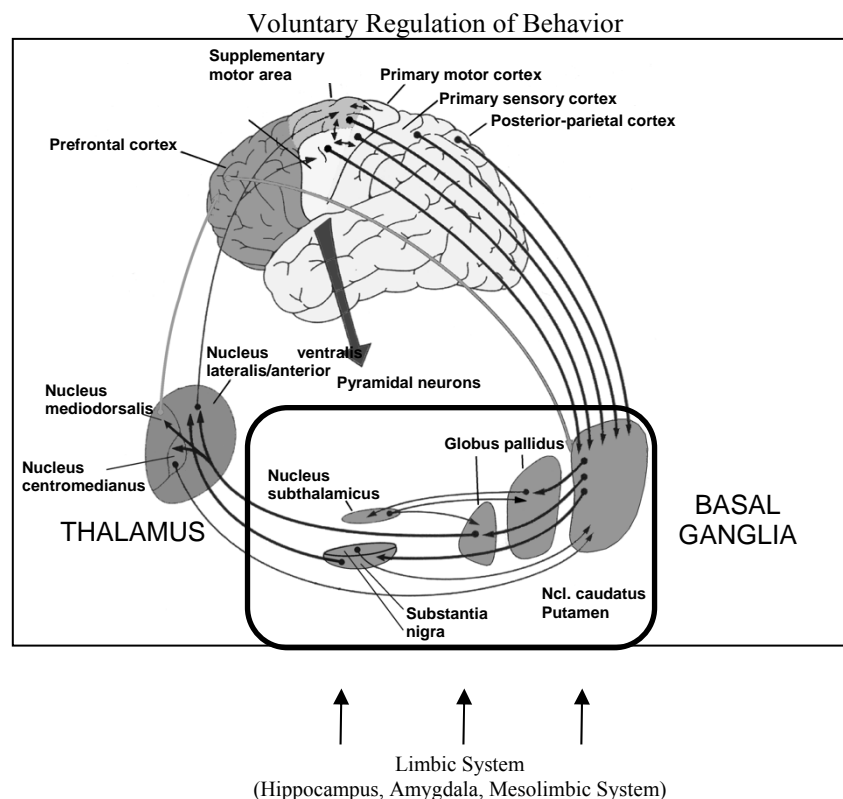


Figure 1: Voluntary regulation of behavior by Gerhard Roth. A complex loop connects the basal ganglia with the thalamus and the frontal lobe. It is in the frontal lobe that movements are planned and coordinated. The basal ganglia seem to act as a filter, blocking the execution of movements that are unsuited to the situation. The limbic system modulates the activity. After the excitement loop has been completed several times, the primary motor cortex is able to carry out the action via the pyramidal neurons. Repeated practice of voluntary motor patterns over time establishes volitional behavior.

Formative Psychology

Behavior patterns are neuromuscular organizations that can be experienced as different stages of somatic motility, porosity, rigidity and density. To learn or maintain behavior patterns requires practice. Patterns that are not used regularly become less available. Through repeated voluntary practice, more stable and complex neural maps grow. These neural maps are a result of neural plasticity, which is especially evident in the prefrontal cortex and in the hippocampus. Focusing attention on how to deal with a given situation somatically is a major Formative concept for influencing the behavioral learning process.

Voluntary Muscular Effort (VME)

Voluntary muscular effort, carried out as micro and macro muscular movements, influences the intensity of a behavior pattern, which in turn results in an altered self-experience. This is the basic Formative principle and protocol for learning and influencing behavior patterns.

Cognitive-emotional experiences are an expression of micro and macro muscular movements. These movements also grow and differentiate kinesthetic and proprioceptive senses, which are involved in the regulation of body posture, muscle tonus and emotional expressions and gestures. VME is a bottom-up dominated dialogue with muscular-cortical influence. In contrast, in a top-down dialogue the organism attempts to calm itself through mental activity. In a bottom-up dialogue, the activity is lateralized to the right prefrontal cortex, while in a top-down dialogue the predominant activity is in the left hemisphere. When visual, auditory and cognitive brain centers, as well as muscular behavior patterns are integrated into the learning process, the corresponding neural-somatic networks gradually acquire more complexity and can be more easily recalled.

VME activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is connected via the amygdala to the orbitofrontal cortex. VME has a calming effect on the viscera by altering the visceral smooth muscle tonus. A high parasympathetic tonus lessens the intensity of the alarm pattern. Furthermore, parasympathetic activity is correlated with the ability to regulate emotions in social interactions.

VME slows down behavior patterns and makes it possible to elaborate details of the pattern in order to influence experience more distinctly. With VME, it is possible to discriminate between similar somatic emotional patterns. This reduces potential confusion between past and present emotional behavior patterns. Voluntary muscular effort subdivides behavior patterns into manageable units and therefore increases the ability for self-management. Minimal voluntary effort immediately changes the quality of the pattern. It can alter a pattern in such a way that a “personal shape” within the pattern is created. Consequently, helplessness is reduced and the learning of muscular support and containment is encouraged. How to form a shape that is both receptive and firm at the same time is an important practice. In Formative language this is called a porous-rigid shape.

The Formative method improves the capacity to make behavioral adjustments and to deal with negative feelings and experiences. The urge to escape from the present somatic reality is greatly reduced. At the same time the Formative method enhances the ability to persist by reducing the intensity of effort. Persistence is a fundamental component of problem solving. In the case of too much effort, a feeling of “wanting to” but “not being able to” may arise. The result of exaggerated effort is distress and exhaustion of the organism. This may lead further to all kinds of stress related symptoms.

Voluntary muscular behavior has to be developed and is the basis for a unique experience of oneself. Over time, VME is the key to forming a personal body identity.

Somatic-Emotional Exercises

VME is practiced by means of somatic-emotional exercises. They intend to teach the regulation of challenges and stress in social situations in a more managed and differentiated way. Additionally, practicing and differentiating motor behavior alters formerly established emotional behavior patterns. With less or more muscular effort the intensity of the pattern can be influenced.

Somatic-emotional exercises focus primarily on the somatic organization of a behavior pattern. They relate thinking and feeling directly to body posture, gestures and muscle tonus. The accompanying feelings and emotions are part of the somatic organization but not the primary interest of the therapeutic intervention. The most important aim is to reorganize neural motor patterns. If somatic-emotional exercises are practiced over a longer period of time, typical behavior patterns such as compacted rigid states or helplessness can be reorganized.

Conclusion

Formative practice, that is voluntary muscular effort, strengthens the function of the frontal cortex and increases the plasticity of both the cortex and the limbic system as a precondition for learning and differentiating behavior. In addition it promotes communication between the two brain hemispheres. Verbal skills, emotional expressiveness, cognitive functions and muscular behavior patterns form a strong unity through repeated practice.

Voluntary muscular effort cultivates the relationship of oneself as a resource for a personal connection to others and the world. Practicing and differentiating motor behavior alters formerly established behavior patterns. This contributes to a state of well being and an enhanced intrinsic motivation for somatic-emotional growth and learning. As an integrated whole, neurobiology and Formative Psychology provide a unifying scientific framework in understanding, influencing and differentiating human behavior.

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Biography

Gerhard Zimmermann, MD, is a dermatologist working as a psychotherapist in private practice in Mainz, Germany. He also has a degree in Gestalt and Behavioral Medicine and specializes in the treatment of psychosomatic and stress related disorders. For the past 15 years, he came to appreciate Stanley Keleman as a teacher, therapist and friend. In an earlier study Dr. Zimmermann verified that Formative Psychology was very effective in the treatment of severe eczema, a chronic skin condition that is highly stress dependent. Email: dr.g.zimmermann@t-online.de

Somatic Emotional Selection An Evolutionary Path

Leila Cohn, MA

Abstract

This article presents Stanley Keleman's Formative Psychology, theory and method, as part of the contemporary paradigm of life as an evolving, self-forming, interconnected system. It emphasizes the contribution of Formative Psychology to the understanding of the human process from a bio-psychological and evolutionary perspective and relates Formative theory and its somatic-emotional methodology to neuroscience research findings involving human consciousness and evolution. The article establishes a correlation between Edelman's neural selection and the occurrence of somatic emotional selection within the practice of the Formative method and states that Keleman's somatic emotional methodology stands as an asset to human participation in the process of evolution.

Keywords

Body – Formative Psychology – Human Evolution – Neural Selection – Somatic Psychotherapy.

My first contact with Formative Psychology happened when I read Stanley Keleman's *Emotional Anatomy* in 1986. I first met Stanley in 1988 when I moved to the Bay Area with the specific intention of learning about Formative theory and practice. As a result of this move, I entered a whole new life cycle, personally and professionally, that kept me in California for the next six years until I moved back to Brazil to found the Center of Formative Psychology in Rio de Janeiro in 1995. The Center now stands as a growing community that includes a professional team of nine Formative psychotherapists who continue forming and developing the Center.

The main impact Stanley Keleman's Formative Psychology had on me was its evolutionary paradigm (Keleman, 1975, 1979, 1985, 1989). Formative Psychology's cosmological vision and biological ground provided me with a fulfilling view of the human being as an ever self-forming living system interacting with itself and with the world around it, moving towards its own growth and maturation. I understood I had encountered a theory and practice grounded on evolution, which could account for human difficulties and diversity outside the scope of psychopathology. This dynamic holographic model based on an embodied reality was a refreshing viewpoint, constituting a sound alternative to the causality model widely present in psychological culture. Furthermore, the understanding of human growth and development from a somatic emotional perspective gave back to the body its humanity and placed the human being in the process of biosocial evolution. From clinical and educational perspectives, this view offers health professionals and educators an alternative to an explanatory approach that looks for the original reasons for problems and ways of repairing the damage. Formative Psychology provides a vision and working model that seek the organizing function of an adaptive shape, and ways to modulate it for the benefit of individual differentiation and growth.

Keleman the Person, the Thinker and the Teacher

Besides the satisfaction of finding a clinical and educational approach with a philosophy that spoke to my heart, I was also impacted by the personal encounter with Stanley Keleman. This article would be crucially incomplete, if it did not mention Keleman's deep humanity and emotional truth. Stanley Keleman is a man whose powerful presence and keen generosity in sharing himself play an enormous part in the transmission of the teachings. Keleman truly embodies the Formative philosophy he teaches, its pulsing spirit reaching the somatic depths that exist in a place beyond words. I can say that the experience of learning directly from him has had a powerful effect on me, for he models what it means to be Formatively present and to live a Formative life. Those who have been with him personally certainly experienced a living model of Formativeness, which probably acted as a powerful asset for them.

This paper intends to pay homage to Stanley Keleman the creative thinker and the bold pioneer who dared to use his great imagination to formulate a somatic-emotional model for the embodied process called human life. I will also establish a correlation between Keleman's Formative model and Edelman's Neural Darwinism, both perspectives springing from the same evolutionary ground.

Keleman's theoretical and methodological narratives resonate at various levels with our living experience of thinking beings. His embodied phenomenological approach to the human journey and the use of a biological model to describe human experience and development extend boundaries in our understanding of individuality and subjectivity. This model also encompasses a dynamic cooperative relationship between the body and the brain. The body is viewed as the matrix, from which the organism's needs for stabilization and growth are directed at the brain, which in turn will work to attend to the soma's necessities. It not only depicts an original non-hierarchical relationship between body and brain, but it also presents the brain as a major receptive organ. This view reverses the usual order of things according to which the brain is viewed as the commander, and the body, the follower. In Keleman's own words: "The brain is pregnant with the body" (oral presentation, Summer Institute, Berkeley, 2004). This poetic statement also talks about the plastic, malleable and changeable qualities of the brain, described now in neuroscience. The interesting thing is that this model of body-brain relationship was imagined by Keleman before advanced imaging techniques revealed detailed neuroanatomy, as well as the physicality of human consciousness. Stanley Keleman's ingeniousness is delivered by his thinking and by the creative and free nature of his thoughts.

The Body as a Subjective Self-Forming Entity

Beginning in the 90's—the decade of the brain—neuroscientists have devoted much of their research efforts to linking the so-called mind functions to their physicality. In trying to establish the physical processes of human consciousness, Edelman (2000) wrote that consciousness arises from particular neural processes as well as from the interactions among the brain, the body and the world. Damasio risked a prediction, by 2050 sufficient knowledge of biological phenomena “will have wiped out the traditional dualistic separations of body/brain, body/mind, and brain/mind” (Damasio, 1999, pp. 75). He further stated, “The awe we have for the mind now could then be extended to the amazing micro structure of the organism and to the complex functions that allow such a structure to generate the mind” (Damasio, 1999, pp. 77).

Keleman views the body as an emotional-anatomical continuum of many layers of organization whose architecture and way of functioning compound the human subjective experience. In other words, the body, with its layers of inherited and formed history, stands as the fountain of human subjectivity. The Formative view and language eliminate the mind-body dichotomy and the need for integrating both, once the human organism is seen as an indivisible continuum. Keleman has been stating over the last 40 years that the mind is in the body; it is not that there is no separation between body and mind; it is that there are not two entities. In his language and view, Keleman offers an original narrative for the phenomenon of consciousness as an embodied process: “The whole body is sentient; the cortex, which is part of the body, can localize a general pattern of response; this interaction of the local and general patterns is part of the human experience we call consciousness.”¹

The three authors, Keleman, Damasio and Edelman hold a vision that connects biology to intelligence and links the body to its subjectivity. In this view, the brain is an evolutionary organ with a growing cortical layer as an expression of the body's own process of evolution. It involves the comprehension of the relationship between the soma and the brain as mutually cooperative, and provides a vision of the human body as an intelligent, self-interacting living system (Keleman, 1985; 1987; Edelman, 1992; 2000; Damasio, 1994; 1999).

Formative Psychology: A Multi-Layered Theory Encompassing Human Complexity

Formative Psychology belongs to our Zeitgeist, and as such, it is part of a larger thinking pattern inside the contemporary paradigm of life as a complex evolving interconnected system. This idea is present in distinct fields in the works of several other authors such as Atlan, Capra, Damasio, Edelman, Kauffman, Maturana, Prigogine and Varela. Keleman's Formative theory (1979, 1985, 1994, 1999) constitutes a complex multi-layered organization, a thinking model that overlaps and interconnects layers of knowledge that include biology, anatomy and physiology, psychology, philosophy, mythology, anthropology and history. Formative Psychology successfully integrates several levels of the human phenomenon—biological, psychological, socio-historical—into a consistent body of theory. Its pulsatory anatomical view links the smallest layers of cellular organization to the large functional shape of the human being as an emotional-thinking-historical organism. This intricate interconnected web of sub-systems accounts for the dynamics of a complex, mutable organization existing in a complex changing world. The Formative model crosses through all layers of human existence and integrates them as a socially viable, coherent and ordered system. The social collective, encompassing human culture and history, is itself a pulsating body constituting another layer of organization in the life net. Keleman's view of subjective experience as a phenomenon that springs from an anatomical reality breaks new ground in the comprehension of human existence.

The Creation of a Somatic Language

Stanley Keleman's Formative theory offers cohesion, consistency and solidity for the understanding of the human situation, for developing ideas about it, as well as for problem solving within it. Formative Psychology encompasses a body of theory, a working methodology and the development of a somatic language to account for the proposed model. The existence of an appropriate somatic language stands as an essential part of a solid conceptual model. It provides a deeper understanding of the Formative theory and method and widens the possibilities of somatic thinking. The creation of a somatic language also allows for allowing multidisciplinary professionals to function within the framework of a somatic logic. It is through somatic language that professionals can organize a treatment within the grounds of the Formative perspective. This asset has been of utmost importance for clinicians working somatically, for it meant an epistemological cut that put an end for the need of constantly borrowing language and concepts from other theoretical models. In the field of clinical psychology, it made it possible for somatic psychotherapists to remain within the framework of the somatic-emotional view when dealing with clinical situations on a daily basis. The somatically based Formative language is a legacy Keleman has given to people who share the view of the human being as a subjective embodied process deeply rooted in an evolutionary journey.

¹ Personal email conversation, 2005. The use of this quote was authorized by Stanley Keleman in May, 2006.
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The Formative Methodology: An Evolutionary Practice

Being a self-forming system that contains a brain, the body selects behaviors that provide for its permanence and growth in the biosphere. The brain, also a selectionist self-forming system in its own right, interacts with its matrix, the body, and strengthens the kind of neuromotor connections that will support the growth of the body and the corresponding selected behaviors that sustain the necessary diversity and adaptive connectivity (Edelman, 2000). The voluntary capacity of the human cortex allows the organism to influence action and manage behavior. It grants the individual the possibility of voluntary self-regulation, affecting anatomy and behavior, which constitutes an asset to her own shaping and to that of the world around her.

The somatic-emotional methodology developed by Keleman (1987) is based on neurophysiological and anatomic principles. It draws on the body and brain properties of plasticity and variability to reorganize anatomy through the practice of voluntary muscular effort and consequent behavioral selection. The Formative method works with the reciprocal interactions between the body and its brain to ensure the possibility of managing behavior. By behavior, we mean a motile anatomic shape generating emotional, cognitive and imaginative experiences. Formative work consists of using voluntary cortical-muscular effort to modulate the intensity of a muscular act and create distinct sub-organizations in inherited and formed behavioral patterns. These sub-organizations—distinct somatic-emotional shapes, each generating distinct subjective experiences—constitute a variety of adaptive possibilities to choose from, a new repertoire of differentiated behaviors (Keleman, 2000-06). The creation of a variety of non-identical muscular intensities generating distinct but similar behavioral possibilities, enhances the adaptive opportunities of an organism facing unforeseen environments. For example, we can think of a person trying to modulate an impulsive pattern of behavior. When working with the Formative methodology, this person will voluntarily increase and decrease the muscular intensity of the impulsive posture in controlled separate steps. Each step along the continuum elicits a differentiated behavioral (emotional-anatomic) possibility, with a corresponding experience. The repetition of the practice, voluntarily coming and going in steps along the continuum of impulsivity, will provide the person with a range of possible intensities within the impulsive act. The possibility of disorganizing a few degrees of intensity in the impulsive pattern may grant the individual a satisfying alternative to the original act. If the selected behavior holds more adaptive possibilities for the organism in a given environment, it establishes its permanence and transmission throughout the biological network. The previous description is consistent with Edelman's statement that "neuronal group selection in global mappings occurs in a dynamic loop that continually matches gesture and posture to several kinds of sensory signals. In other words, the dynamic structure of a global mapping is maintained, refreshed and altered by continual motor activity and rehearsal" (Edelman 2000, pp. 96).

According to the brain properties of value and degeneracy² described in Edelman's Theory of Neuronal Group Selection (TNGS), the selection of a particular behavior that proved to be rewarding in a given situation will activate certain value systems in the brain and lead to the selection of a number of circuits appropriate for performing that action (Edelman, 2000). These different circuits within the degenerate pool will each create a similar result, leading to the repetition or variation of that act. In our example, we can think that the Formative practice will produce a variety of possible alternative behaviors along the impulsive continuum, each of them generating a number of circuits appropriate for its degree of intensity. Therefore, we can say that the creation of distinct sub-organizations within a given pattern of behavior, will significantly multiply the number of corresponding degenerate circuits in the brain, which will in turn lead to the repetition or variation of those acts. In terms of a selectionist system, this means greatly enhancing successful adaptive possibilities. In this sense, we can state that the capability of using voluntary muscular effort towards self-management and regulation constitutes a powerful evolutionary tool.

Somatic-Emotional Selection and Neural Selection

In his Theory of Neuronal Group Selection, Edelman posits the idea of neural evolution as a part of human somatic evolution resulting in the sophistication of cortical interconnectivity and complexity (Edelman, 2000). As mentioned above, Keleman's Formative methodology elicits the human ability to self-regulate and self-shape through the practice of voluntary cortical-muscular effort (Keleman, 1987, 1989, 2000-2006). The method works with the voluntary cortical ability to enhance behavior differentiation and create new synaptic connections. The exercise of self-influence and self-regulation through voluntary effort is "an organismic force of personal and collective evolution" (Keleman, 2005, p. 3). Both Edelman and Keleman hold the vision of the body as a complex interconnected system evolving towards its own organization and growth.

We can now outline the relationship between the process of neural selection and behavioral (cortical-muscular) selection. Edelman's principle of brain selectionism points to the brain property of selecting certain neural circuits out of billions of possibilities (developmental selection) and strengthening its synapses through experiential selection and reentrant processes. Keleman's Formative methodology points to the organism's property of somatic-emotional selection—that is, behavioral selection, based on the individual's capacity to generate other layers of cortical-muscular organization through the regulation of voluntary effort. The creation of distinct degrees of muscular intensity within a defined organization generates new synaptic connections, allowing for the occurrence of somatic selection, since with the Formative work, the person builds a repertoire of behavioral possibilities to choose from. The repeated practice of the selected sub-organizations containing defined muscular intensities constitutes new emotional-anatomic

² Degeneracy is the ability of structurally different neuronal pathways to perform the same function or yield the same behavioral output. Values are systems triggered by salient sensory events that are capable of constraining synaptic plasticity.

realities. These differentiations generate the strengthening of matching synapses, which will consolidate new neural circuitry through reentrant processes.

In his effort to establish the physicality of consciousness, Edelman (2000) states that perceptual categorization usually emerges because of selection during actual behavior in the real world. He points to the fact that neuronal selection and the resulting strengthening of certain synaptic circuits make up a dynamic event based on the interactions between body, brain and the world. He also refers to memory as a procedural constructive re-categorization involving continual motor activity. In this sense, we can affirm that, with the Formative methodology, the possibility of selecting a behavior out of a neuromotor continuum of sub-organizations will influence the selection of neural circuits whose reentrant activity directly affects memory and perception. The repeated practice of the Formative exercises using cortical-muscular effort provides for the creation and selection of new behavioral possibilities; these new pieces of behavior will in turn create and strengthen new circuitry in the brain, which will then influence the consolidation of such newly created behavior (motor activity). Edelman's model of non-representational memory states that each member belonging to a degenerate set of circuits activated at distinct times is also connected to other networks (Edelman, 2000). These interconnections give rise to the associative properties of memory, since an act can trigger a memory, an image can produce an act, or a word can trigger a narrative. This can be confirmed by empirical observation of somebody working formatively in a clinical or educational situation. The practice of regulated muscular-cortical effort along a behavioral continuum generates emotional experiences and memories during the occurrence of that act. The activation of a memory along with the modulation of the muscular intensity associated with it provides for the reorganization of the emotional experience as well as for its corresponding narrative.

The compatibility of the Formative methodology with Edelman's TNGS makes it stand out not only as a practical educational and therapeutic application of such findings, but also as a palpable way to deepen the use of our evolutionary gift, namely the capacity to exert voluntary muscular effort. Thus, the practice of the Formative methodology amounts to a more active participation in our own evolution, charging us, as ethical beings, with the responsibility for the organization of our lives and the forming of a communal life to which we contribute.

Present and Future Developments

The applicability of the Formative methodology has given rise to a large spectrum of possibilities worldwide, both from clinical and educational perspectives. Here, at the Center of Formative Psychology of Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro, we have been running thematic groups embracing a wide range of life situations and challenges. The themes cover: (i) Compulsion and Containment; (ii) Forming Constructive Relationships; (iii) Women and Sexuality; (iv) Bodying Life After 60; (v) Work and Quality of Life; (vi) Young People Forming an Adult Life; (vii) Adolescence and Transformation; and (viii) Contemporary Womanhood—cycles and rhythms of maturation. We have also established a few working partnerships with hospitals and mental health institutions and hope to develop research partnerships in the near future.

The reassuring news is that an international Formative community has been blooming over the last decades, and hopefully we, from Brazil and from many other corners of the world, will be able to strengthen the network through a dynamic reentrant web. Our interconnection will provide new means of exchanging knowledge and developing research that will widen the reach of Formative philosophy and practice.

I take here the opportunity to publicly express my deep gratitude for having received the gift of learning about the Formative theory and methodology, as well as for being able to drink directly from the source.

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Biography

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Acting Hands: The Implications of Hand Gestures in the Somatic Emotional Process of Formative Psychology¹

Peter Löliger, MD

Abstract

A central concern in Formative Psychology is how to create a personal life out of nonvolitional prepersonal behavioral patterns. This first involves the recognition of the spontaneous somatic-emotional patterns of reaction to internal or external stimuli and then holding and deliberately mimicking these forms. By voluntarily applying muscular effort of gradual and distinct intensity, we take the inherited patterns and create personally modelled forms. The work with hand gestures plays a key role in this process. The particularly fine motor skill of the hands enables us, in measured steps, to form and differentiate pre-existing behavioral patterns in the whole body. The following article describes developmental, neurophysiological and psychological aspects of hand gestures and demonstrates their implications in the process of Formative Psychology.

Keywords

Hand Gestures – Mimicking – Voluntary Muscular Forming – Formative Psychology

“The gods gave man brains and hands and created him in their own image—they gave him a gift, an ability superior to animals—through which he is capable of acting not only within the limits of nature’s common laws, but also beyond their limits, so that.... he may create or might be able to create new worlds, new sequences and new order, therefore behaving like the gods.”

— Giordano Bruno²

They appear as volatile, dreamlike shapes in the continuum of life: Hand gestures. They are part of a gestalt in dreams and in daytime actions. We can pay attention to, hold and begin to form them voluntarily³ by mimicking. In this way, out of motile forms,⁴ we choose to create increasingly more stable and repeatable structures.

History of Hand Gestures

As mammals evolved into bipeds, arms and hands were released from their previous restriction as instruments of locomotion. An intense interaction between brain development and the development of hand-motor activities paved the way for the ability to plan and prepare complex motor sequences, which previously had been mostly reflexive and unconscious gestures.

The early history of mankind can be seen as a learning process in which the hands played a key role in the pacing of development. Brain research views human learning as an active, mostly unconscious and preverbal processing of perception and experience produced by muscular-motor activities (behavioral patterns). Hands play the role of pacemaker for these behavioral patterns.

Learning from a phylogenetic perspective could only take place through a close coupling of hand and brain development. The relationship between hand and brain is an interplay in which each is dependent upon the other.

In order to learn from an ontogenetic perspective, the human being must develop a relationship to his/her hands. In early childhood this takes place through moving, grabbing and sucking. Sucking is a form of contact between lips and hands. This, as well as observation of the hands, increases differentiated hand-mouth and hand-eye coordination.

In the beginning, the infant perceives the world through his eyes, independent of his grabbing hands or, conversely, through his hands independent of his vision. Neither means of perception is connected to the other yet. Later on in his development, the baby learns to steer his hand functions by using his vision. Motor movements can be checked for accuracy through visual feedback and corrected as needed.

In the early stages of motor development, the baby grabs with both hands (movement coupling) using the whole palm. The child then progresses from grabbing with the palms of the hands, to a “scissor” grip, and then to a “pincher” grip. The ability to grab is mastered earlier than the ability to release.

Only after a maturation of the sensory-motor system will both hands function separately to form a one-handed grip. This right/left hand separation allows a differentiated dialogue to emerge between right and left.

Right/left handedness is a result of a learning process, which differentiates the roles of the grabbing, tool-wielding hand from that of the holding, sensing hand. The handedness corresponds to the lateralization of the two brain halves and their different tasks. This also allows for a dialogue between them. This motoric dialogue is fundamental for individual learning potential, and it becomes the portal to a personal creation of reality. Through volitional effort, we are free to transcend nonvolitional repetition of the given, which allows us, voluntarily, to generate new motoric patterns and experiences.

¹ The material in this article is a synthesis of Stanley Keleman seminars (1992 to date), psychotherapeutic and personal processes in Formative work, as well as experiences in Formative exercise classes.

² Giordano Bruno, In *Versuch über die menschliche Natur*. Serge Moscovici. p.170 Suhrkamp, 1990.

³ A central concept in Formative Psychology, “voluntarily,” as in “voluntary muscular effort,” refers on the one hand to neuromuscular structures connecting the neocortex with skeletal musculature and on the other hand, to the two-way dialogue and mutual influence of muscular and cortical differentiation. A mutual dialogic function of how cortical structures allow muscular differentiation and muscular structures allow cortical differentiation.

⁴ In Formative Psychology, the term “motile” refers to the four somatypes (rigid, dense, motile, and porous) derived from four tissue reactions to somatic stress.

The Neurobiology of Hand Gestures

As touch organs, hands are equipped with a high density of receptors. They are the center for tactile perception of the self and the outside world.

With the use of highly refined fine motor activity, they become an active sensory organ. Hand movement and perception are intimately linked. The relationship between the brain and the hands builds a balanced, complex web of interdependence. It is interesting to note that in the cerebral cortex, we find a proportionally larger sensory-motor representation of the hands.

Additionally, the fine gradations of sensory-motor actions allow a subtle differentiation in the experience of emotional expression during the Formative stages. This is due to the fact that all sensory-motor information is in direct connection with feeling aspects in the limbic system.

As mentioned, in the infant, the hands are connected with one another through movement coupling. With sensory-motor maturation and the separation of connections between left and right in the cerebrum, hands gain independent functioning. This allows for the possibility of one-handed grabbing.

Mimicking

In working with hand gestures, we use one of the basics of somatic-emotional learning: Imitation, or mimicking. Imitation is a basic way of embodying experiences. The body learns through mimicking. The role-play of mimicked gestures is a voluntary act of embodiment and the creation of personal experience.

From a neurophysiological perspective, the mimicking of gestures follows specific motor schemata,⁵ which order and structure information from sub-processes in the brain. From a single gesture emerges a complete motor pattern. Procedural memory (long-term memory of skills and procedures) is implemented by means of imitation.

The experiences from mimicking hand gestures follow the principle of the unity of the senses, which uses movement or movement designs as its basis. The body is a synesthetic system, meaning the experience of one sense can be translated into and understood by the other senses. (Synesthesia is a technical term in physiology and psychology for the activation of one sense followed by the co-activation of another sense.) For example, kinesthetic experiences can cross over into tactile or visual experiences. Or the perception of colors can be accompanied by the perception of sounds.

Working with gestures through mental imagination activates the same neuromuscular mechanisms as do memories, feelings or active motor processes. Mental imagination activates neuromuscular patterns and neuromuscular patterns activate mental imagination.

Voluntary Muscular Forming

In order to voluntarily perform skilled hand movements, humans must utilize old brain structures that developed earlier in evolution. These lower motoric centers (such as areas of motoric nuclei, brainstem and spinal tracts) originally produced reflex patterns, which can now be voluntarily modulated through muscular-motor (neocortical) exercising.

Practicing

While practicing fine motor skills, all regions of the brain that serve as guidance and motor control are involved. These include the cerebral cortex, cerebellum and basal ganglia. All three brain regions are interconnected through numerous pathways.

Motor practicing is the repetition of a motor-muscular pattern. Learning how to organize an action pattern, so-called procedural learning, takes place primarily through repetition. The sensory-motor information gathered from the repetition of gestures is stored, for the short term, in the hippocampus. It is later transferred to the cortex for long-term storage. This transfer of information occurs mostly while sleeping. Recovery phases are necessary since the brain continues practicing during sleep.

When exercising the repetition of gestures, the manual skills learned from earlier steps become differentiated and transformed. This occurs over a lifetime. It is an acquisition and maintenance process in which experiences are dynamically stored in the central structures.

When we learn a new motor pattern, all of our attention is needed. In the beginning, the movements lack differentiation and are difficult to control. During this phase, the pre-frontal cortex is especially active carrying out the tasks of focusing attention, inhibiting reflex-like movements, planning new non-reflex like movements as well as evaluating the whole process.

With repetition, the increasingly differentiated muscular patterns become more and more automatic. This means that sub-cortical structures take over control and attention is available to take in other experiences.

⁵ Theory of Motor Schemata. In *Funktionell isolierbare kognitive Subprozesse und schizophrene Störungen*. 18-26. Dissertation von Stephan Krieger; Giessen. 1999.
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Philosophy/Psychology of Hand Gestures

The close connection between hand and brain development has enabled humans to manufacture tools. The hands themselves are tools that serve as examples for manufacturing tools.

The dialogue between hand and brain is the basis for the dialogue within oneself as well as for the dialogue with the environment.

In addition to their central purpose in self-organization, hand gestures have an important function in social communication. Hand gestures precede cognitive understanding and actually organize it as well. The acquisition of speech occurs through grasping the world. Hand gestures are the first means of verbal communication. The further development of hand gestures leads to sign language used by the hearing impaired. There is a remarkable equivalence between sign language and spoken language.

Even in the uterus, practicing hand gestures affects the muscular-emotional development process of the young organism. As an outward facing surface and most visible body wall, our hands can initiate somatic-emotional forming processes. The rest of the muscular motor body follows these processes.

By practicing hand gestures in the uterus, a fetus can have its first experience of an external object. The hands themselves can be perceived as an object outside of the fetus. This is also true for the adult. Using hand gestures enables us to observe ourselves from a distance, which is so meaningful in the process of self-organization.

During child development, autonomy of hand movements and the expressive strength of the hands are important requirements for the development of a strong sense of self, independent mobility and speech development. The hands, among other things, help the child to assemble a body scheme. They also help to develop a sense of self in the world and to develop the capability to express feelings and ideas in a differentiated manner. The first type of hand exploration is self-exploration (hand in the mouth, touching other body parts). The first object of examination is one's own body.

In adulthood, hand gestures provide central access to self-regulation. They also enable differentiation and transformation of existing action patterns as we shall see in the following stories.

Hand Gesture Stories

In the next series of short case studies I will attempt to illustrate the above mentioned, theoretically based work with hand gestures within the framework of a Formative approach.

A female client with multiple traumas through sexual abuse keeps her organism in a constant state of alarm with twitchy and nervous hand movements. As she begins to observe these spontaneous events and is capable of slowing them down in very little steps, she becomes able to sense her general state of alarm. The practicing of the alarm patterns through hand gesture exercises sensitizes her to her somatically formed readiness to keep herself on constant alert in order to defend herself from a potential attack. Disorganizing the alarm pattern in steps allows her to experience a greater sense of safety within herself. It distances her from the compulsion of past memories.

A female client who has suffered from anorexia and bulimia for the past 20 years sits across from me while making tense, narrowing hand movements as if she was pushing something away from herself. The gestures are a part of her rigid narrowness that has kept her blocked in a state of indecision with her boyfriend for years. Fine motor stages of forming and unforming these gestures allow her to make the smallest steps towards a more shapeable expansion. Only continual practicing and internalizing of her somatic-emotional expansion patterns enables her to allow more intimacy in her love relationship. Eventually, she dares to live with and ultimately marry her boyfriend.

A constantly changing pattern of hand gestures are keeping a man with a long history of drug abuse from experiencing self-contact—a means of permanent escape. By slowing down the sequences of the gestures, he is able to identify an individual gesture and relate it to a general pattern. This helps him to make the first steps towards a more consistent relationship with himself.

A young woman forms firmness and cohesion in a rigid and stiff external shape as a way to manage her inner chaos. In her family she has experienced much random violence to her body and soul because her father was schizophrenic. Her report on current events and their uncertainties is characterized by reactions of self-assertion to secure her existence with hand gestures in the form of pistols. With the disorganization of these stiff weapon-like gestures, she gains more flexibility without being exposed to her fear of, or becoming lost in, her inner chaos. Through these stages of disorganization the client remembers her experiences of riding and reigning in her horse.

A female client with a deeply dependent structure tries very hard to practice hand gestures in somatic-emotional work during private and group settings. She does this to please her therapist. The gestures are mostly those of holding herself together. By repeating the whole motor pattern, structures become stabilized and their experiences internalized. With time, she recognizes these gestures as shaped forms of her own organization. This realization enables her to achieve more independence.

Gestures are visible expressions of a person's inner movement and can be accompanied by shame. However, because the hand gestures are events that take place far from the center of the body, a certain distance is established. For a young man with intense shame reactions, working with hand gestures makes it possible for self-movement visible from the outside.

A schizophrenic artist experiences his painting as a way to form a shell and as a way to center himself. A Formative exercise can be used to voluntarily mimic a gesture. For example, holding a pencil and drawing open up the experience of the generalization of a pattern that was previously associated with a specific act. Thus, step-by-step, the artist can extend his life expressions that had previously been compulsively narrowed. He is even capable of maintaining his boundaries outside of his artist's studio.

Voluntarily formed gestures with a tightly closed form (a fist) enable a patient with chronic paranoia to become familiar with his spastically stiff body wall and how he uses his body as a means of protection against outside threats. Experiencing the mobility of his stiffness through gradations of intensity of his fist allows changes in his perception of the threat. This helps him to influence the amount of threat through voices. For the client, this is a first experience of the possibility of shaping a mainly subcortical process. This initiates the growth of self-confidence. He is no longer completely at the mercy of foreign and unpredictable forces.

A client with a dense⁶ structure suffers from chronically inflamed large intestines. She confronts unavoidably uncomfortable situations by making a pushing away gesture with inwardly flexed hands. This strong narrowness places her under additional pressure. By exploring a variation of this pushing towards the outside—a pushing with the back of her hands, she experiences a completely new strength in this expansive gesture which, in turn, becomes key to indirectly influencing her spastic colon.

A female client with an ectomorphic⁷ constitution suffers every morning from panic attacks caused by dissociative episodes. Recognizing the large right-left differences in her organism, I lead her through hand gesture exercises: “One hand holds the other.” In this manner, she initiates a dialogue between her two body halves, which enables her to gradually bring the two separated halves closer together. This process of growing coherence enables her to limit her panic attacks.

Hand Gestures are Part of the Formative Process

The Five-Step Principal⁸ of Formative Exercises with Hand Gestures

1. A client begins his therapy session with hand gestures before using words to explain what he would like to convey. I address this volatile, unconscious motor action and ask him to observe and hold the pattern of this gesture. Immediately, a somatic-emotional dialogue starts within him and between us. This becomes the starting point of a conversation between his hands and the rest of his body as well as between his hands and his brain. The local pattern of the hands becomes connected with the whole embodied person as well as with his somatic emotional state.
2. With gradual intensification, the muscular pattern that presents itself spreads throughout the whole organism. This pattern is accompanied by corresponding body sensations, moods, feelings and mental associations. The pattern undergoes an increase in density, leading towards dramatization. While pausing and holding this form, the somatic-emotional experience becomes connected to the client's originally intended theme, which is now experienced as the physical embodiment of the subject he originally wished to address. Eventually, signs of fatigue call for a reduction in the high intensity of the voluntarily formed pattern.
3. Now the client begins to build lower intensity, step by step, led by the fine motor activity of the hands. Staying with the newly created intensity levels of the gesture pattern changes his relationship to the original theme that he was attempting to deal with.
4. Disorganization can be led, step by step, to a lesser or minimal level of intensity. This disorganization can even lead to the possible disappearance of the original reaction pattern. In other words, there is the possibility of more mobility in a relatively formless and directionless state. Maintaining a stable form, over time, opens a door for experiencing inner layers. These inner layers can be experienced as deep organismic movements. They are proprioceptive information: Pulsation, flowing and the experience of inner space.
5. Enriched by these experiences of a clearer relationship to one's self, a new impulse emerges. This impulse enables the client to take a direction, a form that enables him to act. We can now reach back to the old familiar patterns with varied intensity levels, or we can try out a new action pattern that appears to be more appropriate to the inner or outer situation.

The well-developed fine motor activity of the hands makes it possible to create finely adjusted steps and to be able to pause on a still unfamiliar intensity level of a pattern that is in the process of forming. The hands have a leading and pacing function in this process.

⁶ “Dense” is one of the four somatypes of Formative Psychology.

⁷ Ectomorphic, mesomorphic, endomorphic are three constitutional types derived from the three embryological layers. This theory refers to the constitutional theory of William Sheldon and is a component of Formative Psychology.

⁸ In the five steps of the How Exercise of Formative practice, involuntary action patterns are formed with voluntary muscular effort.

Practicing Gestures

We have the following methodological options:

- Working with gestures allows one to carry out motor steps with minimal effort. The sensitivity to stimuli increases proportionally as somatic muscular effort diminishes. Sensory information in itself will not lead to learning; it must be integrated with a motor action.
- To take a spontaneous gesture as a part of a whole pattern: With voluntary forming we approach a deepening experience of what is present.
- To suggest a voluntarily initiated hand gesture as an expression of boundaries or strength or expansion, etc.: In this way, the therapist can guide the client to create a pattern that is not yet consciously or motorically familiar to him. The therapist may also be able to stimulate an experience of somatic-emotional-mental connections.

When we work with hand gestures in Formative practicing, we can encourage whole forming patterns by the use of mimicking. Thus, we open a dialogue from the periphery, the muscular body wall, with the center of the body. This dialogue is the basis of understanding by experiencing the principle of transforming grabbing into grasping. Chains of action also precede the development of verbal language from a phylogenetic as well as from an ontogenetic viewpoint.

Through intensification of a gesture, the developmentally conditioned autonomy of the hand motor activity will be removed. As a local pattern becomes generalized, it becomes possible to experience the whole pattern.

Practicing a motor pattern with the hands allows for sensory-motor differentiation and creates new neuromuscular structures. These new structures promote and influence non-practiced action patterns as well.

With practice, a voluntarily created action becomes involuntary. The sub-cortical structures have taken over the control. The appearance of involuntary hand gestures points to a completed learning process.

Biography

Peter Löliger, MD, is a psychiatrist and psychotherapist in private practice in Basel, Switzerland. He has trained in Psychodynamic Psychotherapies and Bioenergetics. He has studied Formative Psychology with Stanley Keleman for more than 15 years. Email: loeligerp@freesurf.ch

Clients Who Seek to Merge

Sylvia Adler, LCSW

Abstract

In this article, the author describes how she embodies Stanley Keleman's formulations about the stages of bonding in her clinical work with clients with motile character structures. She discusses the stages of Formative therapy with these clients as well as specific therapeutic issues.

Keywords

Somatic Psychotherapy – Formative Psychology – Bonding Patterns
Motile Character Structure – Client/Therapist Relationship

Over more than 30 years of professional study and personal experience, Formative Psychology has come to inform every aspect of my functioning as a psychotherapist, and it has enormously enriched my own life. I came to Formative Psychology as a social worker and family therapist, so from early on in my studies, Formative concepts about the somatic nature of relationships have had a profound influence on me. In this tribute to my teacher and colleague Stanley Keleman, and to his extraordinarily deep humanistic and somatic understanding of the human condition, I have chosen to describe how I embody, in my own clinical practice, his formulation of the stages of bonding in human development, and in the therapy process (Keleman, 1987; Keleman & Adler, 2001). Specifically, I will focus on my Formative work with clients who present highly charged, underbounded structures—clients, that is, with motile character structures.

In line with Keleman's formulation, I see adult clients with motile structures as people who have not evolved through the Formative stages of the parent-child bonding process, from a less differentiated to a more differentiated self. These adults are stuck in the earliest stages, where mother and child are essentially merged. To form a merged bond, then, becomes the motile person's goal in all important relationships. This merging style of functioning continually reinforces the motile person's unformed, underbounded structure, and that person's underbounded way of being in the world.

My work with motile clients has led me to conclude that the most fundamental part of Formative work with these clients involves helping them to learn, experientially, how they organize merging with others, including the therapist. In addition, they need help in learning, experientially, how they can influence this process—which in turn will enable them to form a more distinct, cohered, functional self. Central to this therapeutic endeavor is the way in which client and therapist negotiate the subsequent stages of bonding that emerge as the client seeks to form a more bounded self. Formative Psychology, with its powerful somatic-emotional exercises using voluntary muscular effort, is ideally suited to this endeavor.

This article describes how I apply Formative principles and methodology in long-term work with motile clients. It includes a case example. I also present a few of my ideas about the challenges and pitfalls faced by therapists who work with motile clients. My observations and conclusions are based both on my own clinical practice and on what I have learned from my experience as a case consultant and as a supervisor of other somatic therapists in private practice.

The Motile Client

In *Emotional Anatomy*, Stanley Keleman described four distinct somatic character structures. He called them the swollen structure; the weak, collapsed structure; the dense structure; and the rigid structure. Beginning in the late 1990s, he expanded and reformulated his understanding of the first two types, changing the nomenclature. The swollen structure became the motile structure, and the collapsed structure became the porous structure. As I understand it, the new designations more accurately express the fundamental somatic aspect of these two structures.

These four somatic structures are, in Keleman's schema, specializations of evolving stages of the Formative process. We go from a highly motile unformedness to a more congealed porosity to a rigidification (stiffening) of form to a densification (thickening) of form. Each somatic structure presents a different excitatory configuration, stronger or weaker boundaries, and its own style of relating to others.

The motile structure has a great deal of highly charged excitement and minimal boundaries. People with this structure have a limited capacity to make and sustain boundaries; in fact, they appear resistant to having boundaries. In *Love: A Somatic View*, Keleman states that a motile structure "expands and leaks out because a thin membrane is stretched to the limit by intensified excitement that ruptures and dissolves its container." (1994, p. 38). Motile people may generate considerable anxiety and feel more or less overwhelmed a great deal of the time. Excitability, inflammation, and anxiousness are endemic to the motile structure.

In sessions, motile clients pour themselves out in an intense excitatory stream of detailed descriptions, expansive gestures and heated emotions. They may seem to want to share all the details of their lives, and they do not respond well to the therapist's efforts to get them to talk less. Breaking into the stream can be a challenge. Breaking into the stream to help the client to form a distinct focus for therapeutic work can be even more of a challenge.

Motile people generally do not try to contain themselves while interacting with another person. Rather, they are organized to merge with the other. Their unbounded excitement, agitation and helplessness flood, arouse, or provoke the other. They invade and fill you with their highly charged motility:

[Motile] types do not have enough internal structure or body to live within themselves, so they have to invade another person...[they] are always inflaming themselves...The feeling of the person's inner sensations and desires is moved to the surface and pushed out because it cannot be contained or bodied due to the person's overarousal...[Motile] types move toward others by seduction and manipulation, using their excitement to sweep others in. They extend to others their excitement, then feel that others owe them something in return. They peddle their interest and excitement in order to borrow another's body. (Keleman, 1994, pp 44-45).

When the object of the motile person's excitatory unloading is receptive to being flooded and invaded—is neither impervious nor washed away—a merger is formed. This person, bodily and behaviorally, becomes the container, a kind of boundary maker and order maker. He or she can be said to “body up” the motile person. When this kind of interaction becomes the established pattern between two people, they have formed a somatic contract; two have become one, a merged unit, with each structure contributing specialized functions to the whole. The most typical partners for a motile structure are overbounded persons—those who, in a certain way, are trapped in their overboundedness and need a less bounded person to evoke and bring them forth. One such spouse described his dilemma by saying, “I need someone to flush me out of the bushes.”

The relationship history of the motile person is replete with stuck, merged relationships that were never able to grow into a more differentiated bond. The first of these relationships, of course, is with the mother. Many motile clients, including some in their 50s and 60s, report having had lifelong struggles with their mothers, and seem incapable of separating from them somatically and emotionally. Others report having quietly or loudly erupted out of an enmeshed relationship with a mother, or out of an enmeshed family situation. The use of physical distance or emotional cutoff to create a boundary generally does not encourage the maturational development that a reciprocal separation process provides.

In adult partnered relationships, the motile person can be dominated by his or her partner or served by the partner. In one pattern, the motile person may be one down in the relationship—told what to do, constantly criticized and chastised by the more bounded partner. In another pattern, the motile person's marginal functioning, or seductive enactment of extreme helplessness, runs the show, taking over more and more of the partner's life. Some relationships include both of these patterns.

As a parent, the motile person may be very intensely focused on one child, who is overparented and kept very close. Eventually, this child's immaturity and difficulties in functioning will become evident. At that point, a schoolteacher or a doctor will recommend professional help.

Another parenting pattern involves a kind of role reversal in which one child is inducted into the role of caretaker and/or confidant for the immature parent. This is a well-recognized dynamic in the family therapy field, where such children are described as “parentified” and “adultified” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973).

The motile person will also merge with various relatives, friends, and co-workers. In therapy sessions, the client may bring in opinions attributed to some of these important others, which may obscure who is defining the client's reality or determining the client's direction. This is one manifestation of the elusiveness so characteristic of the motile person. This elusiveness may also manifest as contrariness or negativity, a kind of resistance to being pinned down. Grandiosity is another characteristic of the motile person, more prominent in some clients than in others. It is as if the motile person is using self-inflation to make up for the lack of a solid sense of self.

Therapeutic Issues

It is a well-known axiom that psychotherapists need to pay attention to how we are affected by, and respond to, our clients' presence and presentation of themselves. As somatic therapists attuned to our own embodiment, we are fortunate to have a somatic basis to help us recognize our responses to clients. With the motile client, we need to determine the extent to which our own structure is challenged, or even overwhelmed, by the client's excitement, intensity and emotional heat—all seeking to enter us. In my experience, therapists generally tend to respond initially either with too much form or with not enough form. Therapists who persist in either of these patterns will undermine the therapy. Working with our own somatic presence and our somatic responses to the client enables us to make layers in what is overformed or underformed in our responses. This allows us to offer our clients a much more differentiated, wider range of responses to their merging presence and to their merging behavior with us.

Using Formative theory, it is possible to categorize the range of therapist response patterns with motile clients.

Underbounded Responses

An **underactive, underbounded response pattern** is manifested by therapists who have little to say and allow themselves to be washed away, or simply flooded, by the motile client's highly charged outpourings and invasive presence. These therapists, wittingly or unwittingly, may be operating out of a therapeutic credo that says that clients should be provided with a great deal of room to express themselves. Or these therapists may be unduly empathetic, uncritically accepting everything their clients present, including their inflated grandiosities. This underactive pattern of response will generate and perpetuate a very undifferentiated merger between the motile client and the therapist.

Probably more frequent is the **overactive, underbounded response pattern**. This pattern is manifested by the therapist who is too helpful, offering way too much advice and guidance on major and minor aspects of the client's life in general and the client's decision making in particular. It is as if these therapists and their clients are colluding to keep the clients from having to experience and confront how they invite or seduce others to body them up and make order for them. This pattern of response will generate a somewhat differentiated merger, one in which distinct reciprocal roles of helpless victim and rescuer are played out.

Overbounded Responses

Overbounded response patterns are generated and perpetuated when the therapist feels threatened by the motile client's underbounded, invasive style. Threatened therapists will thicken and stiffen their own structures to deflect the motile client, to keep the motile client out of them as much as possible. Therapists with an **underactive, overbounded response** pattern are relatively emotionally unmoved, untouched by the client's presence and dilemma. These therapists do not engage much with the client verbally. A motile client may not remain long with a therapist who manifests such extreme emotional distance and unresponsiveness.

Therapists with an **overactive, overbounded response pattern** will offer too much advice and guidance while at the same time they bodily fend off the client's overcharged motility, thus keeping the client at an emotional distance. Their clients may feel somewhat received verbally, but they will not have sufficient bodily experience of being allowed in and bodied up. The motile client in this situation may persistently complain that the therapist is "not there" and may attempt to engender a "real response" by engaging in sexual seductiveness and other forms of provocation. Clients who are regressing rather than growing may sometimes be collapsing because the therapy bond has not congealed into a holding life field and a supportive matrix for them. These clients continue to thrash about as they attempt to find a more solid bodying field to hold them up.

Formative Responses

Underbounded response patterns offer clients a merged bodying field that bodies them up, but they do not challenge these clients' merging process or help them to begin to reorganize it. Overbounded response patterns expect clients to function at a more differentiated level than they are capable of, without offering the process that can help them to grow the ability to do so. Formative therapists, whether they tend to be underbounded or overbounded in their own structure, work somatically with whatever difficulty they may experience in bonding with the motile client so that they can receive the client's merging presence and behavior. These therapists offer a firmed-up presence that is neither washed away nor unduly threatened by the client's intensity, invasiveness, or grandiosity. These therapists also understand that offering a supportive bodying field is not enough. Using the methodology of Formative Psychology, they form a partnership with the client. This partnership seeks to foster the client's growth through the discipline of somatic practice, which makes and sustains boundaries that will contain and calm the client's agitation and congeal the client's somatic structure into a more separate self. Working with this Formative process enables clients to rely more on themselves, and to depend less on being bodied up by the therapist.

Stages of Formative Therapy with the Client Who Seeks to Merge

Stage One: Merging

In Stage One, the foundation of the therapy partnership is laid down. Motile clients seek to merge with the therapist, and when a merged bond is formed, the client is bodied up. As a result, the client's symptoms will diminish significantly, and often quite rapidly.

In this first stage, the therapist makes an assessment of the client's structure. This is an ongoing process—one that should involve much more than observing the client and taking a history—and it is enhanced by active engagement with the client. "A diagnosis of a [motile] structure cannot be made until the therapist works with the person and sees that he begins to lose his boundaries when he softens" (Keleman, 1994, p. 45).

In this first stage of the therapy process, the therapist and the client explore and work on the client's presenting problems. While this is going on, the therapist is looking for and beginning to introduce connections between these problems and the client's way of using himself or herself bodily and emotionally.

Another important task for the therapist is to make a beginning assessment of the client's ability and willingness to work on bodying him or herself. This is done by telling clients that they will be expected to engage in Formative exercises during the sessions, and eventually on their own, outside of the sessions. In my experience, clients vary a great deal in their readiness and capacity to do Formative exercises on their own. In general, the client's timetable should be honored. However, for clients in crisis (for example, those who are having panic attacks), it is critical to begin the exercises immediately. Most such clients are eager to be given something concrete to do to help themselves, and they are usually able to work on their own when they are given adequate instruction, even in the initial session.

Stage Two: Beginning to Cohere a Separate Self

Stage Two arrives when clients have made at least a beginning connection between their presenting problems and their somatic situation. This connection includes the recognition that ongoing work on making and sustaining an outside is critical to their growth. Clients' ability to influence their state will vary greatly from one time to the next, but they will begin to show signs of greater resilience in rebounding from times of collapse. One client spoke of her growing commitment to "fighting the forces of formlessness." In this stage there is a clear sense of partnership between the therapist and the client most of the time.

Stage Three: Separating and Extruding

Stage Three represents a critical point in the therapy process. At this stage, motile clients begin to signal the therapist that they want a relationship with more boundaries and less intensity. The most obvious signal is suggesting that the sessions be conducted less frequently. More subtly, the client's changing presence is manifested in a lessening of behaviors, gestures and language seeking support and approval, and a concomitant increase in self-assertive, firmed-up posturing.

Some clients, however, seem able to engender the separation process only by engaging in negative behavior. Suddenly, in a session or a series of sessions, such clients become very critical and uncooperative. There may even be explosive verbal outbursts as these clients attempt to reposition themselves in the relationship. Faced with such a hot or cool onslaught of rejection, many therapists respond initially by acting punitive or hurt. If the therapist is able to reorganize fairly quickly when this happens, it usually turns out to be helpful in the separation process for the client to experience this part of the therapist's humanity. What is critical, however, is that the therapist grasp that there is a positive, Formative thrust in the patient's acting out, and that the therapist be able to encourage the client to think about what he or she is trying to form.

Occasionally—and seemingly no matter how the therapist responds—some motile clients end their therapy abruptly in the hostile, eruptive manner just described. They may later let the therapist know that they eventually came to develop a very positive attitude toward their therapy, and that they now recognize its importance in their lives. Like some young people leaving home, these clients seem able to form a distinct separation only by going through an inflammatory, grievance-collecting process.

Whether it is enacted dramatically and explosively or through a gradual process of detachment, Stage Three involves a dissolution of the merged bond between the motile client and the therapist, and the formation of two distinct bodily presences.

Stage Four: Adult to Adult

When the therapist and the client have successfully negotiated Stage Three, the partnership between them is of a different order. There continues to be a co-formed bodying field, but it is a field that contains two distinct and separate adults in a give-and-take pulsatory relationship of a particular kind. There are fewer crises in the client's life, and the client usually handles these crises on his or her own, discussing them with the therapist after the fact. What is central to the sessions now is somatic reorganization, and work with the client's values and deep internal states.

Case Example

Trudy, a tall, bewildered-looking woman in her 50s, came to me for a couple sessions with her husband, because they were experiencing increasing conflict and mutual dissatisfaction in their marriage. It quickly became clear that the husband had come only to pacify Trudy. He appeared to lack both the capacity and the willingness to consider his part in the difficulties, or to change his behavior. He was rigidly sure about his views of the marriage, blaming Trudy for all of their problems. In contrast, Trudy presented herself as very unsure and self-questioning. She appeared to be mired in intense ambivalence, not only about the marriage, but about almost every aspect of her life. After a few couple sessions and some reduction in the marital tension, the husband dropped out of therapy. Trudy decided to continue on her own; she was intrigued by the possibility that she might be able to help herself bodily.

An ectomorphic mesomorph, Trudy was long limbed, with an athletic build. She looked younger than her stated age and often appeared girlish. She always began sessions with a great deal to say about her very full life with family, friends and co-workers. There was a rather loose, rambling quality to her extensive narratives, but her accounts of her own functioning were fuzzy or nonexistent. I began to intervene by persistently inviting Trudy to talk much more about her responses and her behavior, and much less about other people. Trudy constantly expressed self-doubt about her own actions, and she often seemed not even to know how to think about her experiences with other people, or about her own functioning.

Early in our relationship, I began to notice that, more and more, I was responding to Trudy as I had previously observed her husband doing. That is, I was frequently filling in the words she couldn't seem to find, and offering her information and guidelines about the large and small matters that concerned her. I recognized that I had become way too active in our relationship, and I began paying closer attention to our interactions. When I inhibited and contained myself, I found that I could better observe Trudy and form a clearer sense of my own responses. In this way, I gained the sense that I was being triggered by Trudy's enactment—her postures,

gestures, emotions, facial expressions and language—of herself as a helpless, incompetent girl seeking support, approval and direction from me. I realized that this enactment was not coming from a separate person across the room from me. Rather, it was entering me, bodily, in the rush of words, posturing, and intensity that Trudy sent my way each time we met, from the moment she greeted me in the waiting room.

As I worked somatically with my stance vis-à-vis Trudy, I began to realize that what Trudy's stance elicited in me was my own characteristic somatic response to an experience of heightened motility, in myself or in another person; and that I equated this experience with being out of control and in danger of losing my adult form. This all-too-familiar response is my stance of the rational order maker. Using the Formative exercise, I disassembled this stance, which enabled me to reduce the over activity and respond much more productively to Trudy's merging behavior.

Trudy was cooperative when I asked her to do somatic-emotional exercises, but she performed them mechanically. Her first experiences with the exercises were meaningless to her. It became evident that Trudy's sense of herself was connected to disembodied mental images, and that it was very foreign to her to make a personal connection with the way in which she used herself physically, or with the sensations arising from somatic work.

The turning point came when I called Trudy's attention to her flowing-into-me posture and had her begin to work with the ways she involved her vision in this posture. I asked her to deliberately try to penetrate me with her eyes. She was able to do this and to connect with what she was doing. In disassembling this stance, Trudy, for the first time, took herself from the posture of pouring herself out to the beginning of self-gathering. Finally she could begin to appreciate the meaning of seeking direction and guidance from inside oneself. And she had as a resource a very concrete form that she could use to organize this posture for herself. Throughout Trudy's therapy with me, we worked on versions of this exercise many times. Each time she did them, Trudy learned more and more about making and sustaining a more bounded way of being.

Over time, Trudy took down her persona of the helpless incompetent girl and continued to grow and sustain her form as a competent adult woman. She understood clearly that the key to growing her adult form was the somatic reorganization of her lifelong stance of merging with others as a way of getting them to define her reality. In the course of our work together, Trudy used the Formative approach to help her to reorganize her stance with her husband, her mother, and a number of other important people in her life.

Concluding Comments

Stanley Keleman's description of the motile character structure and his formulation of the stages of bonding in human development and in the therapy process have been the foundation for my thinking about Formative work with clients who seek to merge. In my view, one critical aspect of this work is the evolving relationship between the client and the therapist, and the therapist's attention to this relationship. When therapists can recognize their own somatic-emotional responses to the motile client's invasive presence and merging behaviors, they have the opportunity to work with what may be overformed or underformed in those responses. If necessary, they may choose to do so with the help of a case consultant or a colleague.

Productive Formative work with motile clients always begins with an intensely merged bond, because that is the only way that clients with this structure can form a nourishing connection with another human being. The somatic-emotional exercises of Formative Psychology offer both client and therapist the means of influencing how they are merged, and of forming a partnership to support the client's movement through the subsequent stages of bonding to form a more bounded and congealed adult structure. The art and science of conducting Formative therapy is also enhanced when therapists learn to seamlessly integrate regular work with somatic-emotional exercises in their interactions with their clients.

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Biography

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Preventing Vasovagal Collapse During Minor Operative Procedures

Hubert Mossmann, MD

Abstract

Vasovagal collapse or syncope is an occasional event during operative procedures and treatments with an awake patient. For example, during operations with local anesthesia. When vasovagal collapse occurs the blood pressure of the patient can decrease and he may lose his consciousness. If the blood circulation is not reestablished immediately or if the patient collapses to the ground severe injuries can result. In this article the author describes the use of the How Exercise—established by Stanley Keleman—to prevent vasovagal collapse and thus protect the patients' health.

Keywords

Vasovagal Collapse – Vasovagal Syncope – Hyperventilation – Operation – Formative Psychology

The Mechanism of Vasovagal Collapse

Vasovagal collapse is defined as a sudden and intense widening of venous blood vessels combined with a reduced heart rate that has been triggered by a stimulation of the parasympathetic nerve system. As a result an increased quantity of the blood remains in the venous blood vessels and less blood circulates back to the lungs and heart. This leads to a sudden drop of blood pressure and a reduced blood circulation. This can cause a syncope or an acute loss of consciousness. A standing or sitting person may collapse and be severely injured. A prolonged, reduced circulation can also lead to hypo-oxygenic cramps. If a horizontal position of the body is prohibited, the person can even die. This reaction is regulated by neural cell areas of the brainstem that regulate the cardiovascular circulation.

Recent research points out that this mechanism primarily is an emergency reaction in case of a massive, life threatening bleed after an injury. A reduced blood flow in the limbs and abdomen offers a last chance for blood clotting to stop massive bleeding, before the circulation will completely stop. However, in some people the initial widening of the venous blood vessels is triggered by simple procedures like the drawing of blood samples or during minor operations with local anesthesia.

Vasovagal collapse can also occur in some people when they see blood or when they think or talk about blood. The brainstem is then probably overstimulated by the limbic system.

Clinical Situation

The author is working in a dermatological practice, where he is involved daily with operations using local anesthesia or drawing of samples. Occasionally patients collapsed during these procedures. Sometimes a surgical procedure has to be interrupted to stabilize the cardiovascular circulation of the patient. This increases the risk of contamination in the operation site and of postoperative infection.

The patient may also be traumatized and in a phobic reaction avoid future medical interventions.

Prevention and Established Treatments

Vasovascular collapse is well known in clinical practice and there are several procedures to prevent it. First of all, it is mandatory to ask patients about any history of a tendency to collapse when they see blood or during previous surgical procedures. Questionnaires prior to surgery in local anesthesia should include this issue.

Secondly, placing patients in a horizontal position during the treatments helps to prevent the danger of an injury due to collapsing. Additionally, in Germany, it is typical to give patients medication to increase blood pressure. During the procedure the awake patient should be repeatedly asked about his actual state. Continuous monitoring of the oxygen-saturation and of the heart rate, all along with an inspection of the patient, especially of the face or the skin, for signs of fading away (pale face, turning of the eyes upward, cold sweating, signs of panic reactions), give clues to the beginning vasovagal collapse.

When vasovagal collapse occurs, the patient must be brought to a horizontal position and the legs have to be lifted up. This leads to an increased intravascular blood volume and increased blood pressure. Within minutes a patient can gain a stabilized cardiovascular circulation and regain consciousness.

The How Exercise

The How Exercise is a self-regulatory method developed by Stanley Keleman. Its primary aim is to allow the person to sense his own body activities and to influence them with volitional muscular activity. The focus is how (on the way) the activity is performed.

The method has been developed in a psychotherapeutic setting. It is based on a series of increasing and decreasing muscular tonal activities, done in a step-by-step manner, similar to a pulsatory movement. However, the author has used the How Exercise in his private clinic in a way not primarily intended, but still very effective to prevent vasovagal collapse.

The Application of the How Exercise

The How Exercise can best be used before a vasovagal collapse occurs. Therefore, it is necessary to ask the patient prior to the surgical procedure for a history of collapse, especially due to surgical procedures or blood drawing. If the patient confirms this or if the patient shows signs of anxiety prior to the operation some instructions should be given. This can be done in a short period of time, and effectively before or after the application of the local anesthesia. The basic idea of influencing your own reaction, for example the level of the blood pressure, should be explained.

The patient is instructed to increase the muscular tone of his arms and fists in a step-by-step manner. The patient should not include the head, face, throat and thorax to avoid an increased pressure on the cervical baroreceptors, altered breathing or high pressure on central parts of the cardiovascular system. The important point is to increase the tension in discrete steps, and to maintain each step at least five seconds so that the patient can experience the intensity of his muscular effort. The patient should be asked to number his effort as a percentage. Therefore it is helpful to let him increase the tension to 20, 30, 50, 80 percent. In younger, healthy patients the tension can be increased up to 100 percent.

If the tension is not visible, it has to be tested, for example by pressing the bended lower arm downward. Testing the degree of rigidity as a sign of substantial tension is crucial, as patients tend to overestimate their effort. If there is insubstantial tension, the patient should be instructed to increase it. Then the patient is instructed to deliberately reduce the tension in several steps. Each step has to be held at least five seconds, until the patient can recognize the intensity of his tension.

Next the patient should be advised to reduce the tension in the arms to about 20 percent of the maximum intensity, but to hold this tension in a way that he does not get exhausted during the procedure. Then the patient should extend the exercise into the lower part of the trunk and continue with the abdomen and the lower extremities.

If the procedure is going to exceed more than five minutes, the patient should be asked to do the step-by-step increase and decrease of the arms and legs alternately. For example he should keep 20 percent of the tension in the arms and put more tension in the lower legs. This is done so that the patient, who is not used to physical exercise or who is producing too much tension for a prolonged time, is not getting exhausted.

As a by-product, the patient's attention is less focused on the operation procedures and more focused on his own ability to influence his physical state. At the end of the procedure the patient should reduce the tension in arms and legs and trunk to 20 percent and sit up slowly.

The patient can be instructed to remember this exercise and to practice it to be able to repeat it in similar future situations.

Result of Using the How Exercise

In the author's practice, the occasional event of a vasovagal collapse during surgical procedures has decreased further. Today it occurs only rarely and mostly in patients who do not communicate their history of prior collapse and their fear of the procedure. Therefore this exercise is strongly recommended. Before instructing patients, this exercise should be practiced personally in order to get used to it and its effects on systemic circulation.

Effects of the How Exercise

Different reasons may explain the effects of this exercise. Doing this exercise will increase blood circulation. The pressure of muscle groups on the blood vessels can increase blood pressure further. This will send different signals to the regulating brain stem area. Also the patient's attention is altered. Instead of passively waiting for the procedure to be performed on his body, he is involved in his own activities and he has to concentrate on his own exercising. This will alter his perception of external signals that have previously been linked with the collapse reaction.

Conclusion

This unusual use of the How Exercise has been helpful to prevent vasovagal collapse in the author's private practice. Although it does not fulfill the primary intention of the How Exercise, it includes several features of it. In a step by step manner, the patient exercises to learn a new way to organize his own body. By being able to repeat this method, the patient learns an exercise to influence himself. His experience of using himself differently, as well as the effects on his blood circulation during the exercise, influences his self-perception and his perception of the situation on the operation table.

Instead of patterns of panic and collapse, he learns patterns of personalized actions that stabilize his condition and help him to make new experiences of self-control in a previously uncontrolled situation.

This shows the abilities of the How Exercise, used as an isometric exercise—done in self-calculated steps—to influence physiological parameters, in this case the blood circulation.

Recently the author also used this exercise successfully in a similar clinical situation with patients in the early stage of hyperventilation. This supports the thesis that major effects of the How Exercise are due to a cerebral feedback, for example on the brain stem area. The How Exercise is a powerful tool to prevent complications during operative or invasive procedures and at the same time it leads to better treatment results. As a by-product, the health practitioner can work in a less stressed way, being able to deal better with occasionally occurring emergency situations.

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Biography

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Influencing Flashbacks by Using Voluntary Muscular Effort A Case History

Gine Dijkers-Lotgering

Abstract

In this article, I describe how a person learned to manage the involuntary flashbacks of a traumatic experience. Memories are anatomic structures and somatic organizations. Flashbacks are involuntary memories.

Keywords

Flashback – Voluntary Muscular Effort – Containing

Several years ago a young woman came to my practice in Germany asking for help with repeated episodes of lower back pain. The somatic shape and state she presented was porous, a semi-firm shape with a boundary formation that is swinging between losing its boundaries and trying to keep its boundaries.

I introduced the Formative method to help her learn to recognize how she used herself. We began with standing, walking and sitting. In the sessions, I asked her to muscularly organize a typical muscular, somatic shape, then in measured steps to give it more intensity. She responded by making more muscular tonus in the upper legs and buttocks. Practicing moving and holding herself with more voluntary muscle tonus gave her the experience of more shape and firmer boundaries for herself. She reported that standing, sitting and moving in a slightly different way gave her a different experience of how she was in the room and with me.

After a few months, she was able to manage her lower back pain and I thought she would stop coming. But to my surprise she did not, and I wondered why. I chose not to ask her and to let her decide the steps she wanted to make in our relationship. Years later she told me that my acceptance of her way of relating and working with the exercises was very important. She said it gave her, “the beginning of a new feeling of confidence in myself and the people around me.”

It was only months later that she told me that she had been sexually abused by her father over a period of several years.

She felt this caused her to have frequent panic attacks. She said she was often overwhelmed by flashbacks of the abuse and would cry for hours curled up in a hibernation pattern and did not dare to sleep without a light. When I asked her to imitate what she called a panic attack I saw a freezing pattern of such intensity that she disassociated. This involuntary pattern of extreme stiffening, pulling back her neck and taking her head to one side was so intense, the only way she could influence the contractions was by hurting herself. I explained that voluntary influence of an involuntary behavior begins as an inhibition, a slowing down or holding still of a simple reflex act. Over time she learned to voluntarily differentiate the reflex pattern of stiffening by organizing and disorganizing the muscular pattern that led her to disassociate.

She discovered that she had to make very small and deliberate steps in the differentiating process. After each step she had to wait and hold the shape, otherwise she was overwhelmed by her own involuntary responses. She learned that containment is a muscular act and that by making a muscular edge she could make a new shape with a firm boundary. She also learned how to give her porosity some rigidity by using macro and micro muscular contractions to make more firmness in her shape. She did this by intensifying the muscular tension in her hands and feet. This localized action had a generalized effect, a more firm shape. Organizing herself this way gave her the experience of more stability in her relationships and in her daily life. She also noticed that the tension in the small muscles around the spine could disorganize a little bit, which helped her to better manage the lower back pain.

In working with her, I learned to recognize a somatic pattern in myself. It was a familiar response I call “saving helplessness” where I organized the muscular pattern of stiffening my body wall and pulling up my lower body accompanied by thoughts of taking away her suffering or finding solutions for her. Working with this pattern by using the steps of the Formative method, I learned how to receive and contain my own feelings and excitement that were evoked by her suffering.

Working with my somatic patterns, I learned to manage my urge to tell her she was not guilty. I could respond in a different way and be present to listen to her.

Over time, she was more and more able to manage her episodes of flashbacks and panic. Although they were not gone, she had learned more functional ways rather than hurting herself to influence a pattern of behavior. Most of the time, she could influence herself and form different responses. The quality of her life changed profoundly and she became a more self-confident woman. Her whole story changed from one of being a trapped victim to a more Formative narrative, “Oh, so this is the way I respond to the insults done to me. Now I can form different responses.”

At this point, she decided to have less private sessions and to participate in an ongoing somatic practice class and a group with a Formative focus. During a practice class, one of the exercises stimulated flashbacks of the abuse. She asked to work on this in a private session. The important part of the exercise, for this article, is the action of lifting the pelvis. Beginning in a lying down position, class participants were asked to organize a muscular motor pattern to raise the pelvis up toward the ceiling and lower it in small discrete steps. For my client, the lowering of the pelvis seemed to stimulate the flashbacks.

In our private session, I asked her to repeat the exercise with as much differentiation in shape as possible, to raise and lower her pelvis in the smallest, slowest steps she could manage. She discovered that in the action of lowering her pelvis she responded with involuntary squeezing and this evoked the flashback. Now we had a connection between doing something—organizing a muscular pattern in the pelvis—and the involuntary response of squeezing and the involuntary flashback. She had direct

experience of the flashback as it connected to the involuntary squeezing of the muscles of the pelvis. This underlined Stanley Keleman's statement that memory is structure and structure is behavior.

The next step was to practice differentiating the shapes of the muscular pattern. She was increasingly able to make smaller and slower movements. As she did this, she learned to wait after each step and hold the shape long enough to give it more duration. In the disorganizing she could hold a shape long enough to experience a sensation of swelling and expanding. I asked her to give this shape an edge by giving it some rigidity (that is, making a firmer boundary).

I asked her if she could do one step more and use micro movements to give this edge a bit more rigidity then hold it—less rigidity—hold it and then to repeat this in her own rhythm. By doing this she was able to recognize a range of instability and stability in organizing the shapes and the accompanying changes in her experience. When the shape was unstable she had the impulse to squeeze and when she did the movement she was accompanied by the flashback. By giving the edge more rigidity, she was able to form a more stable organization and she had no impulse to squeeze and no flashback. As she repeated and practiced giving more form to the swelling shape she was able to stay more in contact with the sensations deep in her pelvis without having a flashback. She did this exercise regularly at home and gained confidence in her ability to influence and manage her responses.

At this point, I asked Stanley Keleman what he could suggest as a next step. He replied, "How about organizing the pattern of self-reliance and see how she can form her own behavior and sustain her own sensations and thoughts." She continued to use the Formative method to discover how she could use voluntary muscular effort to influence involuntary behavior in different patterns that evoked the flashbacks of the abuse. She was very committed to the process and practiced it in daily life. In another somatic practice class we explored the motor pattern of "being responsible" in the sense of being at fault, of doing something wrong and being blamed. The feedback she gave of her experience with this exercise illustrates her growing ability to sustain her own sensations and to form a different sense of her self. "I experienced a well-known pattern and if I did not make an edge the flashbacks came accompanied by thoughts, "Of course I am guilty, I have done everything wrong and everyone is angry with me." But when I give each step an edge, I have no flashback and my thoughts change. I now understand how I do it, how I always responded with a pattern of blaming myself. I can experience how I have been formed by this reflex pattern of squeezing and how it is associated with the deep fear that has been with me for so many years. In doing this exercise, I am able to be actively involved in a dialogue with my fear and to regulate my behavior by organizing different response patterns. I have also learned that I can use the practice in my daily life, and not just when I am in trouble, because I enjoy doing it and because I feel gratitude for being able to grow my personal power."

At approximately the same time she wrote me about what growing meant to her. "Formative Psychology and the method of somatic practice has taught me that I can influence my form. First I learned to do it with help from the outside. You asked me, what do you do... do it more and do it less. After a while this became an inner voice helping me to be attentive to how I am doing things and to the voluntary and involuntary effort it takes. I now experience this learning as basic to my growth. Knowing how to use voluntary muscular effort gives me the ability to influence myself by containing my experience or by reorganizing my shape and changing my experience. When I first started working with the issue of abuse, I would experience the instant reflex of squeezing whenever I heard or experienced anything related to sexuality. Today I recognize the response and I am able to influence it. My growth is directly connected with organizing and differentiating an edge, which I now know gives me a boundary for my experience. I have also learned that influencing my form gives me a sense of my own interiority and subjective experience. Creating an edge and making a boundary has become an experience in my muscles. It gives me the experience of a container for my porosity. Growing is, for me, being able to say good-bye to how I judged myself. When I am able to influence my somatic shape and reflex responses, questions of good or bad are no longer important. As long as I am pulsating I can form myself."

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Biography

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Formative Acupuncture

Isobel Cosgrove & Tim Davis

Abstract

The article shows how the Formative method can be used in an acupuncture treatment, or series of treatments, in 2 ways. First, by providing a context in which the session is carried out, and second by the introduction of Formative exercises into the treatment protocol. This does not replace established and effective Chinese medical methodology. It adds a new dimension, challenges the traditional belief that herbs and acupuncture re-balance, and re-establish what was present before illness occurred. Formative Psychology introduces the possibility that something new is forming. Our case study shows layers of firmness being introduced to a porous structure and pulse. It would also be possible to show how to support a rigid, dense or motile pulse with further case studies.

Keywords

Case Study – Chinese Medicine – Energy – Porosity

This article describes the process of our beginning to work formatively both in our own lives and as Chinese medical practitioners with clients.

In 1999, we worked for the first time with Stanley Keleman at the European Summer Institute in Holland. We were struck by the deep connection we had with ourselves during the workshop and afterwards when working with the Formative exercises.

For us Formative work has at its core the basic biological organizing principles of life. This gives it a vibrancy and integrity that is inescapable. Growing a connection with the work over the last few years has animated our lives. We wondered how this would affect our work as acupuncturists?

Being present with ourselves, what is formed and what is forming offers a field of stability and aliveness to the client that shapes the therapeutic encounter. In this way a Formative dimension is added to the treatment process.

Chinese Medicine is often seen as a way to rebalance the patient's energy, and as a return to health. While it should not be diminished, this perspective lacks the possibility that something new is forming—a new shape, a new structure, a new way of experiencing.

To incorporate this possibility, we have adjusted our clinical gaze. By clinical gaze, we mean “the conceptual structures which constitute the frame of reference within which all questions are asked and all answers offered.”¹

This paper looks at how, by introducing the Formative method into the treatment process, the patient can become aware of how they are present, how they can participate, and how they can support their own healing. Not all acupuncture clients will wish or be able to actively engage in a Formative dialogue. For example, if they are suffering from migraine they may avoid cheese or chocolate but be unwilling to disorganize a rigid body structure. Sometimes, we have to accept that holding a Formative clinical gaze is all we can bring to a traditional acupuncture session. At other times the patient will actively engage with the Formative method and take another step.

To our Chinese medical protocol we have added what we are calling “Formative questions.”² These are:

- Where is the client in their adult development?
- Where in the continuum of under-formed to over-formed?
- What is their constitutional type (endomorph, mesomorph, ectomorph)?
- What is ending, what is in transition and what is trying to collect in their lives?
- How can the treatment support them?

These questions arise from a Formative orientation and the answers shape our responses to the client. The following case study gives a practical illustration of how we are using what we have learned and are learning. It shows how we have used Western medical diagnosis, Chinese medical diagnosis, and finally a Formative diagnosis to give the client's treatment process a new context.

Case Study

H. is a young woman, 16 years old, living in Wales, attending school and she is in the middle of final exams.

She was presented with difficulty sleeping, very low energy levels following a series of lung infections, which were treated recurrently with antibiotics. She asked for help to clear her symptoms, to sleep longer and to have more energy for her exams.

Western Medical Diagnosis

1. Severe dyslexia
2. Chronic fatigue/post viral syndrome

¹ See Ted Kapchuk, in “The Culture History and Discourse of Chinese Medicine,” *Journal of Chinese Medicine*. 24 May 1987.

² From notes on Supervision Group with Stanley Keleman at the Spectrum Centre for Psychotherapy in London.

3. Weakened immune function
4. Insomnia
5. Recurrent hives, sore throats and fevers.

Chinese Medical Diagnosis

1. Damp and heat (inflamed throat, lungs and skin; aching muscles and joints).
2. Weak and deficient underlying Qi (energy). Her pulse is soft, spilling over its boundaries, rolling without force. It lacks vitality, reflecting a deficient energy. It is called a “soggy” pulse reflecting damp and excess fluidity.
3. Heat in the heart; red points on the tip of her tongue, indicating mental and emotional agitation.

Formative Diagnosis

1. H. is an endomorph.
2. As with her pulse (described above under Chinese medical diagnosis) H. is under-formed, porous and diffused. She is tall, with rounded torso and limbs, lacking in muscle tone, with slow movements.
3. In the treatment room she moves from being vague and lifeless, lacking in concentration and vitality to short bursts of animated, even agitated, conversation and activity. Then she returns to being vague and lacking in vitality.

Chinese Medical Protocol

H.’s treatment has concentrated on clearing the damp, heat and agitation from her energy channels. At this stage it is useful to make a brief statement about the anatomy of Qi (energy, vital life force) in the channels.

The energy flows along channels, feeding vitality to the organs, tissue, muscle, tendons and bones. In H.’s case the treatment was first to treat damp, heat and emotional agitation with herbs to dry and cool, and to use acupuncture points on the spleen and heart channels to clear heat and stickiness impeding the flow of Qi. After this first stage we also had to address the underlying energetic deficiency leading to her fatigue, using tonic herbs and acupuncture points to fill and restore energetic reserves.

Within this Chinese medical model there is an expectation that patients participate in their own treatment process. They will follow seasonal changes in lifestyle, practice Tai Chi & Chi Gong exercises and alter their diet.

“The three months of Autumn are the time of harvest. The energy of Heaven begins to blow swiftly and the energy of Earth begins to change colour (sic). One should go to bed early and rise early: Maintain a peaceful mind in order to mitigate the decaying effects of Autumn; and restrain one’s desires outwardly in order to preserve the energy of the Lungs. The Qi of Autumn controls nourishing and receiving. If one does not follow these rules in the Autumn, one will fall ill in the Winter.”³

In Western medicine the predominant paradigm encourages patients to be passive. They come to Chinese medical treatments with beliefs affected by their experiences of and relationship with Western doctors. Twenty years ago, and even ten years ago, there was a large gap between our belief system as practitioners of Traditional Acupuncture and most patients’ beliefs. Recently there has been more information available about how Chinese Medicine works and so the gap is narrowing. More people are now willing to engage in and take joint responsibility for the treatment process. For example, a patient suffering from migraine will see a connection between their condition and diet and be willing to avoid cheese and chocolate.

The Treatment Process

Stage 1

During the first 2 months of treatment with acupuncture weekly and herbs daily, H. had intermittent improvement in her symptoms; less throat inflammation and skin hives, more energy and sleep, and a better immune function (less colds & fevers). These improvements would hold for a few days and then fade; our problem was that after a treatment she would feel much better and then later would re-inflate and collapse.

This is understandable within a Formative diagnosis of porosity. In other words, she was unable to contain the energy generated in the acupuncture treatment. Her energy would swell but then would diffuse with no structure to hold it. The way forward for H. was to form a firmer structure that would contain the diffusion.

³ From Giovanni Maciocia, in the *Three Treasures Newsletter*, Autumn 2002.

Stage 2

We noticed that H. was having difficulty giving herself recovery time. Being dyslexic means she has to work harder to keep up. Home is next to school; friends visit before and after a school day and at lunch time. Her identity is bound up with intense social contact. With an under-formed structure, inflammation and surface agitation recur, especially when she is overstimulated; exhaustion follows with insufficient recovery time.

In a family meeting, we requested more regulation in H.'s life to support our treatments; regular clinic visits, even if unwell; more downtime after school; regular meals, etc. In this way we were introducing the idea of more structure in H.'s life to the whole family unit.

With greater regulation, H.'s improvement steadied and held longer during her school term. In the holiday her routine faltered, and with less regulation externally (school days, family rules) her inflammation returned. We had introduced the idea of more structure into H's family life. However, we had not yet introduced an experience of her forming a firmer structure in herself. At this point, we took her case to a Formative Supervision Day.

Stage 3

The central question we took to supervision was "how can we intervene to create more form and structure, so that she can contain her impulses and responses. At the point of contact, the treatment room, how can we as practitioners contact the client to influence the forming of more structure?" Stanley suggested we introduce a Formative exercise protocol that H. could do before, during, and after treatment.

Formative Exercise

Instead of lying flat on the treatment couch while the needles were in the energy channels and points, H. would sit up, forming fists with both hands. She would then create more muscle tone by doing Step 2, "Doing It More." The needles would then be inserted while she did the exercise. This would introduce a layer of firmness into her porous structure while the needles stayed in. When there is little tonus in the muscles, there is porosity in the physiological structure. However, we now think that there is also porosity in the anatomical structure of the acupuncture channels through which H.'s energy flows. Her energy diffuses in the channels and lacks containment, like a river overflowing its banks. With a firmed muscle tone, in Step 2, the energy is more bounded in the channels. In this way, the exercise introduces to H. the *experience* of firmness, structure and containment during her treatments.

It provides an experiential template for H. that will orientate her towards forming firmer layers within her porous structure and endomorphic form.

After removing the needles to clear damp and heat, reservoir points were tonified to address the issue of energetic deficiency, while H. again repeated the exercise, making more muscle tone. This gave structure to contain and sustain the impact of her treatment; to stabilize and regulate the flow in the channels rather than increasing the flow and seeing it diffuse into more inflammation.

When doing the Formative exercise, I discussed with H. the function of this intervention: that we were introducing an experience of firmness and participation—first in the treatment room, and next into daily life—as a basis for her supporting herself. She practiced the exercise at home and during subsequent treatments and talked of the impact it had on her timetable leading up to exams.

I noticed a change in the quality of contact with her at this stage: She was less vague, and more focused with more vitality and sense of direction.

Since introducing the exercise, H. has sustained progress over the last two months of treatment with a steadier and improved level of health. The cycle of inflammation and collapse is ending. The acupuncture treatments seemed unable to sustain a steady progress towards more stability and fuller energetic reserves.

The client, a relatively unformed adolescent girl, began to form a layer of firmness in her previously predominantly porous structure. By repeating the Formative exercise introduced into the acupuncture treatments H. was forming a different shape in herself and her life.

She began to take responsibility for taking her own herbs, coming to treatments and maintaining more stability and regularity—in other words she is beginning to grow an adult form. In the past few weeks her grandfather was ill, and her parents were away from home. H. rang to cancel a treatment as she had no-one to drive her. I suggested she find a bus or taxi and she agreed, came to the treatment and thanked me for my suggestion. She said she needed to come, and that she recognized in herself the need for the structure and regularity that gives more duration and stability to her health recovery.

We felt she was beginning to recognize and support what is growing in her—more firmness, more resolve, more intention—more form. More firmness generated a feeling in her of independence and self-esteem.

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Biographies

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Forming a Personal Shape: My Formative Journey

Danielle Chauvelot

Abstract

This text describes my Formative journey, the process of forming my personal shape in the years I have worked with Stanley Keleman. I depict each phase in the forming of my shape: firstly, learning to recognize and embody my shape; secondly, forming a contained shape; thirdly, growing and managing my form in daily life; and finally, maturing my shape. This article can be seen as a practical illustration of working with oneself using Stanley Keleman's somatic practice.

Keywords

Personal Growth – Personal Account – Working with the How-Method
Bodily Practice – Formative Psychology

The Importance of Bonding

This narrative relates the process of forming my personal shape in the more than ten years I have worked with Stanley Keleman. During this Formative process, I have learned to dismantle the basic bodily patterns I formed in the past, and to create from them a way to (re)organize myself. In this way, I grew a mature somatic self, closer to my own truth. This personal shape, which did not exist before, enables me to organize another form of being alive, of living a personal existence.

This could only take place in the teaching and training situation Stanley provided. The bond, the kind of connection I formed with him, established the living place where I could experience who I was and where I stood. I needed it in order to form every step in my growth. In this bonding, my way of moving back and forth from me to him formed a model for my functioning in the world.

Stanley pointed out to me with an ongoing generosity a way to form my own shape. For me, his responses throughout our Formative relationship were those of an older adult who considered me as a growing adult. He was friendly and helpful, continuously maintaining a firm boundary with me. I needed these qualities of connection and distance for my own growth. Depending on the process I went through he formed his answers: Support of and recognition for what was, encouragement to make form and to make distinct my own way, appreciation for my growing ability to organize, and, all-encompassing, an ongoing presence of love and connection.

This narrative consists of five parts. Each part depicts a phase in the forming and deepening of my shape, in my form and the effort I made to form, in the identity and behavior it provided me with and in the experience and vision it carried. These phases do not only have a sequential logic. They also evolve through a cyclical order, each of them open-ended, presenting themselves again through all the others.

I have written about this Formative journey from the point of view of the person I am now, with my present form, knowing and Formative language¹ and also with the comprehension and compassion I gained for myself over the years.

An Imperative Urge to Grow

When I began to do somatic work, I was in a transitional phase of my life, at the beginning of menopause. By nature, I was fond of feelings of closeness, of being accepted, being together, and I had always had a lot of appetite. I mostly enjoyed my aliveness. I was used to being emotional, to identifying myself with feelings. My desires could become out of proportion, and if unfulfilled, take possession of me. My usual way to control them was trying to overcome or suppress them, which could be painful for me.

During my Formative journey, I learned to recognize this conflict as a constitutional dilemma, and myself as an endomorph to whom the closeness and attention of my family were not properly given in my early life. I was left with an incredible urge to “take in” and it had not been possible for me to form a membrane between myself and others.

I always formed bonds in the same peculiar way. It was delicious to be wanted, loved. But I was always afraid of rejection, of losing the connection with the other, although it was not the reality of my life. Although I was successful in the things I undertook, I suffered from a lack of self-worth. In my relationships with others, I was dependent on situations and principally reactive. I could be at ease, full of warmth and creativity, could even be seen as an authority by others. But I was inclined to put certain persons who were important to me into such positions of authority that I myself became diminished, or even terrified, as if I did not exist myself.

I was experienced in working with myself and knew this internal conflict but I had the feeling that, at this basic level, life was only happening to me. Now I know that knowing is not enough. I myself was generating my bodily responses; in this way I continually and automatically repeated this eternal drama of my existence. I did it without knowing it, without knowing a way to influence them fundamentally.

¹ The Formative language and terms used in this article are those I learned while working with Stanley Keleman. Some terms he has coined himself, for instance somagram, underbanded, and accordion exercise while others are words used in specific meanings different from the ordinary ones, or in grammatical patterns that deviate from the regular ones; examples are appetite, swell, overwhelm (used as a noun), and grow (used as a transitive verb applied to humans and their activities rather than to plants). Some terms have been placed between double quotes to facilitate reading. I refer those readers interested in Keleman's Formative language to his own work.

I was looking for an adult identity, but felt powerless and unsure about being myself. I was longing to be present in the world, but this did not have a concrete representation or meaning to me: I did not experience myself as being and acting in the world. Instead I thought that my inside and outside worlds were so different that they would never meet.

I was eager to learn the vision and the Bodying Practice that Stanley taught, and excited about meeting him. I vividly remember the particular way in which I presented myself to Stanley in the group. I imperatively needed to make contact, thrust by the urge to prevent myself from disappearing in the mass and stimulated by the work of another participant. I had to make sure I was part of the group, to hear my voice, to feel present. I stood up, and this spontaneous action brought Stanley in front of me, and I said something like, "Here I am." At the same time, I held back impulsively, severely inhibiting any movement or word. Stanley said, "You just want me to see you, to stand in front of you, don't you?" I could only agree. He worked with me, helping me to do the contraction in my upper body more and less. At a certain moment, a wave of excitement developed in me as a "wanting to take in," and he said, "So, do you want to enter me? But I am a reserved man!" Later, I made the timid statement, "Stanley, I don't want to enter you, I want to become an adult."

Through these interactions Stanley and I formed a primary bond. Stanley's firmed-up stance reflected to me a powerful presence: Concerned and accepting, and simultaneously making a clear reserve and boundary. I had the intimate conviction I had found a teacher able to make the response I needed.

Recognizing and Embodying My Shape

I went through a long period of instability. My process organized itself along two distinct movements that mingled with and influenced each other. Sometimes they seemed in conflict, which was confusing and stressful.

On the one hand, it was extraordinary to experience that shape exists. I began the process of recognizing that I existed by forms, that I was embodied. I marveled that the way in which I used myself produced my feelings; that my experiences turned out to be shapes, ways of doing, of behaving. I began to take time on my own and slow down in order to experience myself bodily, to look at my shapes, to see them, to feel how my own movements gave rise to inner sensations. I was enthusiastic and, soon, I dared to embody my shapes.

On the other hand, I expected it would work in the same way in the group. When simply listening to Stanley with closed eyes, I was very touched. Intuitively, I knew he voiced my truth for me, my secret longing to grow. I intimately understood him and felt recognized. At other moments I was full of longing; an enormous "swelling" developed in me as if I wanted to make Stanley's words mine, to incorporate them. It was very frightening, and when I looked at him, I did not dare to make contact with him anymore. He was big and I was small. I did not only have admiration for his work and his adult way of being present, I made an inaccessible authority of him. I judged myself and I had to keep it secret. I could not manage the difficulties I had with the group exercises and the language. I increasingly became caught in a dilemma. The more I was longing to be present in an "adult way" (my image of the *second adult*, which Stanley was talking about), the more I had to recognize I did not succeed. I finally became a prey to emotional storms that overwhelmed me totally.

The clue was embodying the experiences of my struggle. I wanted to learn to manage it. I drew soma grams. Various shapes from big to small appeared: Longing, wanting to take in; trying to keep myself together with criticism, disappointed. Even feeling overwhelmed was a form. In a similar way, many emotions and attitudes manifested themselves in my bond with Stanley: Admiration, envy, anger, distrust, fear, submission, despair. It demanded courage to begin to embody, to experience these shapes. I made strong movements, as a reflex, impulsively. It took much effort, and I inevitably lost all strength. To be able to recognize these emotional stances as shapes in order to body them was a good activity for me. It gave me a sense of participating, making an effort to create order and a certain rest.

My struggle was my way to show myself my own muscular patterns operating. I began to see how I was using myself, caught between two opposite directions. The more I swelled and made myself big, the more I compressed myself by making big bodily contractions, so I was continually in danger of explosion, ready to burst or lose form altogether. The result was feeling overwhelmed, helpless, distressed. These two shapes (big and small) formed a whole, two ends of a continuum, as a natural way to regulate myself. It happened to me automatically, in extreme ways, and I was at the mercy of that.

Over the years I learned to know my structure as motile, unformed. Excitement possessed me. I felt my lower body underbanded, with a lack of foundation that felt unstable, with a protruding belly. Some parts of my body, such as my lower back, shoulders, and neck were very dense in order to compensate for this underbandedness, but failed to sustain it. Releasing the tensions, by crying for instance, I could break through the pelvic floor and was in danger of being flooded by emotion. When I learned that membranes are created bodily in the process of human interaction, I realized that it had not been possible for me in my early life to grow membranes. My family used to do things for me or I was left feeling alone and overwhelmed.

I tried to speak with Stanley about my learning. In our interaction, my constitutional drama was fully present, and not being able to express my thoughts was very frustrating for me. Now I see how Stanley answered by means of attempts to prevent explosions, in order for me to contain myself. He gave me support by giving me his hand. I might press his hand with different intensities. I learned to do the same by myself, pressuring myself in a gentle "assembling" way. It was a revelation to me. Stanley saw me as "somebody who could be destabilized by so much vitality." All of a sudden my situation became un-dramatized. This was part of the process. It was essential to learn to do it another way: To do the pressure exercise.

It demanded a lot of time and effort to allow this deep process of undoing an old pattern and forming another shape to take place. I was willing to act differently, but did not yet have another form to support myself. I intuited an underlying stream, but another urge thrust me forward: To be better, to have power, to go faster.

I impetuously resisted the unknown. I finally faced the fact that the familiar ways to protect myself were not useful any more. I really needed to take them in hand. I recognized them as my alpha-adults. Although I was torn by hope and sorrow, the desire to share with Stanley won. I decided to write to him and to share my process.

This action marked a turning point, a first step in making a boundary absolutely necessary to affirm myself. It was important to be able to sustain the (imaginary) risk of rejection and an enormous relief to end this unbearable situation. It meant to me that I was ending a deep pattern of functioning. It became very clear to me that my familiar behavior of being helpless versus coping on my own was based on distrust and served to avoid being present in the relationship. I was also beginning the process of reshaping myself.

The way Stanley received me made me understand I had been longing to be received in my own power, while realizing at the same time how terrifying it was. He formulated my struggle as *“a struggle to make form, to give shape and express my interiority.”* His words penetrated me. It was true. My cry was not for help, but for *“contact to be with myself, and with others.”* It was my deepest desire.

I needed form. My *“two shapes needed a middle.”* I had *“to do the practice with care and love,”* as Stanley said. I deeply wanted to commit myself to this. I felt a kind of promise, for more human ground.

Toward a Contained Shape

I entered a constructive phase. I formed a way to do the practice with more confidence and its reality was a powerful learning process.

“Doing the exercise is hard work. Its practice is subtle and asks patience,” Stanley had said. I practiced in gradations the two shapes of my dilemma: Intense longing to be present, doing it less, then less, then doing the same thing with “holding back.” I especially tried to maintain contact with my belly and feet. I learned organizing and disorganizing, using my muscles volitionally. I used them very strongly, very intensively, doing my utmost. In two-three steps I was at the top of my ability, unable to sustain the effort; then I finally went back to giving up all pressure.

“Do the practice slowly and deeply, and the power of your overwhelm when given form will be a powerful presence and interiority,” Stanley had written, but I enjoyed doing it as I did. Later on I learned to make more discrete steps, not to give up the form too quickly, to wait a little. Every time I did the “accordion exercise” with the shapes of my dilemma (the big/middle/small, as I called them), I held myself in a contained space in between that I began to appreciate.

Working in the group was more difficult. The urge to “enter” manifested itself directly. In my whole body I recognized how the “raw” in me could possess me, in my head, muscles, gestures, in breath and belly, but I accepted how essential it was to form boundaries. I was continually working, doing and undoing the shapes of my emerging states. I was often more involved in my own doing than in listening to or doing the group exercises. I saw how my quick movements served to draw other people’s attention, to keep me away from myself. It was very difficult for me to wait, to hold the impulse to swell, to bear the emerging scary feeling in my belly. So I learned to make form, to prevent being overwhelmed, to have some say in regulating my excitement. Gradually a shift appeared. I became less dispersed. To be more and more able to contain my excitement and to give it form slowly quieted the state of “overwhelm.” I was glad I began to participate in the work of others. Mimicking their stances or gestures when working with Stanley, I applied them to my own shape-forming. I obtained a certain experience, freedom and rest. I was mostly proud of my growing ability to influence my shape.

Another aspect came up, when I began to stop myself volitionally—for example, my cries. I had to make a firm gesture with my hands, to mobilize a bottom in my pelvis, a wall in my belly, a straight back, a serious face: “No” emerged. My ability to give continuity to my shape grew; if I lost the connection, I knew the way back, and made more appropriate little steps: My first steps in self-discipline.

A creative phase occurred. I progressively entered an inner world. I occupied a middle ground in myself. I experienced it as a kind of gestation of the newly conceived. Dreams made their appearance. I immersed myself in their abundance. There were beautiful dreams, signaling the old, announcing the next step. I mostly trusted my dreams: Coming from my cellular depth, speaking to me, willing to become flesh. Embodying the figures was like planting each piece of the dream as a little seed in my inner soil. Motile shapes of my impulsiveness always appeared, and, when inhibited and given duration, led to the creation of boundaries. Experiencing pulsations in my pelvis, head and legs for the first time, I understood that my head needed to nestle into my viscera and I was able to help hold myself in an inner space. I marveled that it was possible to feel the quiet warm tide of my own sea inside. I was creating a container for my own bodily life.

I understood I gave Stanley the role of being a receptacle for my excitement, in order to form my own receptacle. I learned to build a friendly cooperation with him. We were engaged in common work, the forming of my somatic adult. He literally lent his body to help me to contain myself. By experiencing how he held me, I was able to take that holding ability into myself. I repeated exercises at home using him as a model containing me. It was marvelous to learn to give form to the continuum of shapes emerging from my “devouring” waves. There were various different selves each with a pulsatory rhythm, a different size, simultaneously malleable and firm: reaching out, enthusiastic, timid, wondering, yielding and encompassing the whole, full of a soft vitality: There I was doing myself. To write about my work to Stanley helped me to stay with myself.

I remember very warmly the time I showed my forming shape in the group. Using my gestures of intimacy, I made a firm boundary between Stanley and myself with my right arm and hand; with my left hand a fist, close to my belly, telling me, "Stay here!" It was really new to organize myself in such a way that a contained form appeared. My gestures provided me with connection and separation, distance and closeness with myself and with Stanley: There I was. Stanley taught me to go back and forth with the movement of my hands, in small steps. I was able to maintain contact with the shape while slowly moving, learning to make variations in the shape. It was a pure delight to have such a close and powerful contact with my warm full tide inside, certainly in the company of others. I brought about a profound shift in my shape. I taught myself to form a container to be present with myself, and with others. My *second adult* gently wanted to make her appearance; I was simply happy.

Managing My Shape in Daily Life

Applying somatic work to my recurrent dilemma changed my life progressively; the changes extended to different fields, in private and professionally.

My contained shape provided me with a somatic structure allowing me to be present, and to act in a different way. In the process of organizing my actions, I kept supporting my shape by using voluntary muscular effort. This ongoing process encouraged the forming of new behavior and a new identity in a fruitful way. My shape gained more body, solidity and stability; it more and more became its real size.

It took time, experimentation and patience, and was quite challenging. I learned to enjoy effort and activity. I revealed myself as willing to be present and to live my formativeness. My mesomorphic layer came fully into play in working somatically, in reorganizing, redefining the shape of my emotional behavior. I made different layers inside the contained shape. It functioned as a frame within which I could begin to exist with connection and separation. I formed a body wall, making flexible boundaries that could vary in intensity and duration. My muscles sometimes presented the dilemma of how to undo my shoulders, if not mobilizing the holding pattern from inside out. I found answers by practicing, using my muscles and brain differently, engaging in an inner dialogue. Rigidity and motility went together, solidity and liquidity, softness and firmness. In daily life I was able to live more with different feeling states; I could, for instance, assert myself just by asking questions, or express a request or a simple wish. It was a big change to have more appropriate behavior and to shape a more satisfying connection between myself and others.

Increasingly the practice became a kind of lifestyle. I now did exercises not only when in trouble, to prevent unwanted experiences, or to prepare for some (new) situation, but in quiet, just out of interest, for myself. My practice was more in being attentive, in becoming intimate with my own organizing pattern, my Formative process. It was a creative process to incorporate my learning in many situations: Looking, speaking, walking, waiting, driving the car, eating, buying clothes, writing, working and so on. I did not know I could enjoy activity so much. The result was that I was filled with fresh vitality, rest and satisfaction. Most importantly, it served to help me remember: "Danielle, stay with yourself!" I acquired another kind of relating to myself, a more self-reflective attitude. This self-management provided me with a solid container for my own power.

In my work too, I altered my position step by step. More and more I learned to use the Formative principles and method. From a therapist who worked traditionally by being present for others, I formed a shape that allowed me to be present with others. I became more of a teacher-therapist. In the collaboration with my colleague Piet, I also deepened, brought myself more apart and together. Working with him, joining our efforts, knowing and competence, is a real gift for me to put into the service of our common work. It is a joy for me to teach people to participate in their own bodying process and to transmit the vision and method of Formative Psychology.

My following step was attending the Professional Class. I took part in this group very seriously; my participation was a personal act of being present. I was able to be with myself and others. I formed a new position in the group and with a distinct way to participate. It was a great experience for me to write case histories and to present them for supervision. Writing formed a way to express a dear wish: Sharing my way of working. I was thankful for Stanley's appreciation and for being embedded in the peer group. Being an adult now began to mean taking my emotional life in charge and giving it form. The boundary I was now creating made distinct my own way to be present with my knowing and competence. This meant that I now knew how to make order, to organize myself, and, when contained, express myself as a way to conduct my life, to be my own authority.

In fact, the relationship I began to have with myself gave me a warm inner company I deeply appreciated. A yielding stance arose in me announcing the next phase: To mature.

Ripening, Deepening My Shape

The connections I am "growing forth" are reflected in my relationship with myself, with the biosphere, in my relationships with Stanley and others.

A sacred dimension becomes present in daily life, a sensation of letting the world come to me. I receive the habitual more deeply and re-appreciate what is. What abundance there is around me! I experience a faithful stance, a generous look in my eyes, joy in my heart. Living is more giving and receiving, is being more alive with what is growing in a shared space or rhythm. I recognize the difference of the other more, and at the same time I am more with the situation of others. I feel grateful for the love and intimacy I share with my husband and with friends. I now see life and death as part of our natural process. With my very aged sick mother, I can

maintain a connection, and I can be tender and enjoy being with her. This all endows my life with luminous moments and a warm glow.

Dreams had announced this intimate and strange dimension, this depth of experience, as a call for the deep ancient woman to be received into my present woman. To body the dream figures and spheres led me to a special place: A kind of experience of eternity. To do and repeat the work, applying the method, making layers of each phase, made me more and more able to savor each depth. The dream work I shared with Stanley enabled me to receive even more deeply into myself this mysterious source.

In the workshops I am now present in a silent and intense way. I participate by doing and applying the exercises Stanley is offering, guided by my own rhythm, interest and “visceral” brain. A distant proximity with Stanley and others gives me a warm sense of power, of belonging while being able to exist in my own knowing. The more I individuate/differentiate, the more I experience my somatic self, the more I feel connected with others.

Being able to stay with myself while sharing with Stanley, is leading me to the essential next step, which is learning to make connections. Last year I faced two points in my interaction with him. First, I experienced how strong my (over-) dramatizing pattern was and how deeply it served me to arouse other people’s interest and draw them close to me. Never before did I see so fully how my constitutional dilemma functioned: Being close to the other meant giving up closeness to myself. Being close to myself excluded the other, meant loneliness. At the same time, I saw the transformation. Closeness could begin with being close to myself, and this could become the starting point of connecting to the other, as my way of being in the world.

Second, I saw how strongly my pattern required boundaries. Stanley’s response made it possible for me to vigorously experience his bodily boundary. He was present for me without allowing himself to be invaded. He taught me the following step to take, namely how to use minimal muscular intensity. This interaction helped me to further create my own sense of adequate limitation of bodily respect and of sanity.

I did the practice again for myself and revisited my basic constitutional organization. It made clear to me that a new ending was coming. I felt respect for my own limits. I was tired of proving my power, my goodness; it was time to stop. My mature body was telling me to take it easier. Fatigue or some pain in my lower back signaled that I had to use my muscles yet more slowly, gently. Minimal effort was already effort; mobilizing my body mass one imperceptible step was enough.

In this way I am forming a more differentiated somatic interior. It is an exquisite experience to be softly connected, receptive. If tears appear, they are contained, tender and precious. Even with the tiniest amount of pressure, or simply by closing my eyes, a full warm streaming bathes me. Presently I am learning to grow layers of connections in my shape, by practicing the assembling and disassembling exercise with the hands. Sometimes this works in a very natural way. Assembling is a gathering together: I connect to my inside. By stiffening I give some firmness: I swell and expand slightly. To disassemble I have to compact, in very measured steps, in order to keep connected. It is a kind of experience of being close, not only in one place inside me, but also while moving from this place to another, making layers, staying with and influencing the closeness and distance to myself, and consequently to the other.

I keep close to me the last time I addressed Stanley in the group. I was able to apply to our living interaction the assembling and disassembling exercise. I felt the wish to simply be with what was. I felt how the excitement of my contact with him filled me, and how I was able to contain. I managed the continuum of responses I successively generated and stayed connected with each of them, by assembling and disassembling myself with the hands, as an example of what I had learned. I made distinct two-three layers, regulating distance and proximity between me and Stanley, back and forth. I was able to savor the qualities of the connections I made, to finally receive the closeness of my hands on my breast. I was impressed that I gave voice to my doing and experiencing. I had a shape allowing words for who I truly was.

Stanley listened to me; his quiet empathy, his sincere faith resonated in me. When I stopped, I was filled by a wave of intense peacefulness that seemed to spread to the people around me, sharing in a profound silence, in pulsating together. In living space I formed a personal shape able to grow connections as a way of being present in the world I live in.

A “Journey” in the Journey

Honoring Stanley’s person and work with this piece of writing is part and parcel of my ongoing moving from me to him, and back to myself, following the course of our bonding. Stanley taught me my own way to proceed, and to be true to it. I thank him infinitely for being there with me.

His books have always accompanied me, helping me to incarnate his vision and method, to understand more of myself. But in the period before writing this article I positively immersed myself in them, and never before did I have the sensation that I could so deeply receive what living our formativeness is about, what it means to become a Formative human being. I understood I had grown up and began to embrace my own journey.

By the act of writing, I committed myself to sustaining a firm form. As a result I obtained a deeper understanding and a clearer vision of the Formative processes I had gone through. I especially saw fully my ongoing way of forming myself, and my life. I received even more deeply the evidence that I am the actor, the creator of my personal shape and experiences.

While I was writing, this deeper understanding and clearer vision in their turn influenced the form and content of the narrative; in this way it took its present form. It was funny to see how many of the processes depicted occurred in a nutshell during the writing: Bubbling with activity, being hampered and not being able to go further, pausing, starting again and making order, reorganizing the whole, and especially, maintaining and enjoying the effort.

Biography

Danielle Chauvelot lives and works in Groningen, The Netherlands. In 1970, she began a career in Gestalt therapy and Bioenergetic Analysis. She has had a private practice for individuals and groups for more than 20 years. Over the last ten years, her source of inspiration has been the Formative Psychology of Stanley Keleman, and she has participated in his workshops and professional classes. Her practice is now growing into a Center for teaching Somatic Education and Therapy. Email: chauvelot@freeler.nl

Managing Panic Using Formative Psychology: A Personal Account

Maggie McKenzie, UKCP

Abstract

An account of the effect of using Formative Psychology to influence states of panic.

Keywords

Endings – Formative Psychology Applications – Panic – Self-Management – Stage of Life

I am a 56-year-old Australian woman who grew up in an abusive, alcoholic, critical family situation where I became watchful, constantly active and responsible. I distanced, held warmth, anxiety and fears deep inside and planned for my life to begin in the future when I left the family home. My body as a young adult was upright, stiff, held in the neck, low back and genitals, my pelvis tilted back, with a squeezed forward protruding ribcage. While I was eager to please and looking to others for how to be in the world, I was actually longing for a home and to be recognized and loved. I moved to London, where I now live, in 1974. I met Terry Cooper and Jenner Roth in 1980, and through them, Stanley Keleman in 1983. Throughout the next 15 years of living and working as a therapist and becoming a parent, I learned to lessen the rigidity in my pelvis, spine and neck, to expand my ribcage and to recognize myself, but not to make satisfactory contact. I compressed my chest, rounded my shoulders, pushed my chin forward, tongue to the roof of my mouth and stilled myself. I was holding still, waiting for my life to begin.

In the summer of 1996, I began to experience more fatigue by the end of my day; shorter, heavier and more painful periods; increased levels of anxiety in more and more situations and infrequent but intense hot flushes, heat rising from my feet and spreading upwards. This was beginning of menopause.

In the following years, I responded to high levels of noise or heat, large groups of people, enclosed spaces, busy supermarkets, cinemas, theatres and queues, by producing heat, agitation, panic and an urgency to get out, to move.

In response to increasing internal heat I compressed more, holding in my fears and anxiety. Becoming denser, compressing my chest and gripping my abdomen, clenching my buttocks and squeezing my neck so that my chin came forward and I pressured my head. I worked harder, longer hours, made more mistakes, felt isolated, unloving and unlovable.

By the summer of 1999, I emailed Stanley. I was frightened, my blood pressure was very high (180/110). Stanley telephoned and talked with me about my structure being dense/rigid and my needing to respond to what was swelling and growing within me by lessening my density. With Stanley's response I found courage to continue and looked forward to that summer's workshop in Holland.

During that period of time there were added external demands and pressures on my colleagues and myself, as a person with whom we all worked closely decided to leave our organization in conflict and his leaving would take place over six months. I responded by tightening further and having more experiences of panic and overwhelm. I managed my increasing experiences of overwhelm by reducing all but the necessary activities and sometimes by collapsing. I avoided any crowded, enclosed or highly stimulating situation. I was sleeping four or five hours nightly, was exhausted and had put on weight.

I was determined to attend the 1999 summer workshop in Holland in late August that was titled "Taking Change of Your Life: Intimacy and Gestures." I was relieved and anticipatory and so concerned about over-heating that I sat at the end of the back row. On the first morning, Stanley spoke of intimacy and body proximity going together, and of body proximity generating the warm and wet experience of being at home. He also spoke of the state of intimacy being linked to growth and the presence of the growing edge, where unformedness relies on the base of "what was" to form "what will be"—and that this base is unstable. I thought, as I frequently have, that Stanley was speaking directly to me.

Stanley spoke of how using the five steps, the methodology of Formative Psychology, encourages structural states of closeness and the organization of the experience of being close to oneself. Yes, I thought, this is for me. This year I was experiencing an unstable self that I needed to contain, put structure to. I felt as if I was in a state of flux in each moment.

During the afternoon session, Stanley introduced an exercise of opening and closing the hands. In response to opening my hands I had produced heat, swelling, profuse sweating and a racing pulse. I could just manage to contain this experience with a considerable effort. I put my hand up and having gained Stanley's attention I described my response, by which time my heart and respiratory rates were very high. I felt hot and so liquid I thought I would melt. Stanley asked me to do the panic. I placed my left hand on my chest, my right hand was by my side, both were open and with the fingers over-extended, I pushed down and forward in my neck, my eyes wide, I was holding tight in my torso. Stanley asked me to "do it" and "do it more," then to "undo in the hands and then the neck, repeat and then rest." He gave me a series of statements to make—"I can hold my panic." "Don't panic in response to the panic." "I can hold my heat and swelling." Again, Stanley asked me to do the panic shape, "do it more" then "undo in the hands, the neck."

I became less frightened, as I felt my feet on the floor. He then asked me to bring my hands upwards and forwards one step at a time, holding each position as a frame. I did the first two or three steps tightly and rigidly, then Stanley showed me how to extend my arms. I continued to do the steps more softly, with less muscular pressure inwards and saying at each step "I can contain my heat and swelling." The statement was true, I felt in charge for the first time in months. As I experienced my edges in the boundary of my skin and the presence of my muscles and bones, I became hopeful and more at ease.

Stanley asked me how I felt about dying. I said "fearful." "Yes," he said, "You are dying. We all are. Something is dying, that's the heat, and something else is trying to grow."

I understood that fertility and menstruation were dying, and that the alpha adult with its mesomorphic “can do” principle was beginning to end. Stanley had spoken in the morning about the alpha adult parenting the *second adult* as this latter begins to grow into existence, that we are then unknown to ourselves and confronted with the self not knowing ourselves, the unfamiliar. How am I going to relate to what is showing itself in this strange set of experiences when the mesomorphic confronting approach does not work? These statements reflected my experience, Stanley spoke with me after my experience in the group saying that these experiences were the beginning of disorganizing density and containing swelling and heat; that the panic is the end result of density meeting the swelling of something growing.

I felt relief, warmth, I could feel my limbs on the inside and the outside, I recognized a different style of mesomorphic activity and I had an exercise to work with to grow this new approach.

From this moment in time, I have not panicked in response to panic or to heat or overstimulation.

Over the following weeks and months, I repeated the exercise I had learned with Stanley each morning and each evening and any time during the day when I felt any signal of beginning to produce overwhelm in response to heat or pressure. I made decisions to change how I lived and worked. I saw clients for 50 minutes out of each hour and made other regular pauses to rest and reflect during my day. I learned to organize to sit at the end of a row when visiting the cinema or theatre, to sit on the aisle in a plane.

With further input from Stanley each year and working with Terry and Jenner, I have changed my daily exercise. The theme is the same, I continue to make layers in my density and as I do, I have more fluid, porous experiences.

I now live with more warmth, liquidity, tenderness and have a more meaningful existence.

Biography

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Formative Psychology: An Antidote to Descartes' Dualism

Christina Loeffel Hickey, MA, MFT

Abstract

Drawing from personal experiences, the author describes how by using the Formative Psychology methodology in a variety of family and stepfamily circumstances, she learned to work with her responses and experiences in the physical somatic present, rather than thinking about them as narratives based on stories of the past. She describes the transition from a reliance on a psychological language rooted in dualities and oppositional dramas of mind/body, understanding/reacting, conscious/unconscious to a Formative somatic language, narrative and perspective.

Keywords

Dualism – Embodiment – Formative Language – Organismic Experience – Formative Perspective – Comparative Narratives – Mind/Body Dualism

When I first began working and studying with Stanley Keleman, the language of psychology with its focus on thoughts and feelings and words like needs, wants, power and self-esteem was deeply embedded in how I understood myself and others. Notions like integrating parts of oneself, personalizing an archetype and forming a relationship with the unconscious were everyday language for me before I studied Formative Psychology. From my academic studies I understood that this psychological language was rooted in the Cartesian separation of mind and body and thus noted, with fascination, Stanley Keleman's ability to communicate his experiences, both personally and therapeutically, without using this Cartesian dichotomy.

In my graduate studies, which focused on the theories and practices of Carl Jung and his students, the resolution of dualism was a primary focus and a client's presenting problems were seen in this light. What was unconscious was a function of the opposing forces of a person's life (e.g., masculinity/femininity; good/evil, love/hate, body/mind). Integration of the two sides of an archetype was a path to individuation, a goal of long-term therapy. Although departing from the singular Oedipal mythology of Freud's approach, this goal was the same: Bringing the unconscious into consciousness.

Then, one day Stanley said to me, "The body *is* the unconscious." In that moment, what had been theoretical became practical and what had been invisible and mysterious was accessible. What I was learning from Stanley Keleman was that the unknown is how we body ourselves and the five step methodology he has laid out are a way to educate ourselves about this embodying process.

Just as I was beginning my relationship with Formative Psychology, I entered into a relationship with a man who would become my husband. Working with Stanley during these early years of our relationship and doing the exercises, I began the process of growing a Formative perspective and formulating my personal goals differently than I had before. First, I learned to identify how I was bodying myself physically (i.e., squeezing, stiffening, using muscular pressure to make shapes, gestures etc.) Slowly, I began to experience the relationship between how I was bodied in situations and how I experienced these situations. As I practiced the bodying steps, I learned that I could influence how I was bodied. Initially, I was amazed that I could alter my experiences in so many significant ways with small changes just in the intensity of my musculature. Being mostly porous, it took some time before I could sustain a form long enough to identify it and recognize its particular effects (i.e., feelings, thoughts, sensations). Fortunately,

as I was learning this, Stanley's questions and reflections helped me focus on forming responses rather than reacting to what was happening externally in my new family.

The early years of our marriage included living with my husband's two children part-time. If I had been limited to my psychological understanding of my interactions with my stepchildren, my husband and his former wife, I might not have been able to form a deep bond with my husband. I would have explained the dynamics I found myself in from my experiences with and psychological study of groups. I would have worried about triangulations and poor boundaries. I would have understood my reactions to the various family members only in relation to my "family of origin." And I would have been stuck between two choices: To react or to understand, neither of which would have helped me grow myself as an adult woman in a marriage, forming a family.

I remember the time early in our living together that I came home and my husband's former wife's car was taking both spaces in the driveway and she was in the living room with her daughter. I called my husband at work expecting that he should "set the boundaries" with her so this would not happen again. He refused. When I discussed this with Stanley, I learned ways to make this a Formative event for myself. He helped me identify my somatic organization of "being invaded" and find responses I could form to alter repeat occurrences. Some of these responses were intrapersonal and some were interpersonal. All of them were Formative.

From a psychological perspective, I brought fears of abandonment to my relationship with my husband, and his dense structure was a perfect match for me to re-experience these "wounds." When we had conflicts, he withdrew and I panicked as the "abandonment complex" held me in its grip. All the psychological understanding in the world was not going to stop this drama from occurring. We were going to be stuck in a dynamic of polarizations. Learning about our different constitutions and developmental body types helped me to take our conflicts less personally and fearfully, but I still felt and thought about these experiences from my cultural bias of oppositions. (i.e., his body type v. my body type, etc.) When I worked with Stanley he was not at all interested in this dualism drama. Instead, he asked me to experience how I was bodying myself in the conflicts. I began to recognize that I held myself together more tightly than I could sustain. Then I would collapse this holding so completely that I was generating feelings of hopelessness and loss. Anger would erupt in bursts and disappear. I couldn't hold a form long enough to make any changes and I would be caught in the extremes of rigidity and collapse. Gradually, with Stanley's guidance I learned to catch the disorganization of the rigidity in layers of intensity that I could sustain and thereby experience porosity. The feelings of loss and abandonment were

replaced with the pleasure of holding myself, sometimes firmly, sometimes gently. Panic lessened and forming my life as a porous person replaced being lived by rigidity and collapse.

From this Formative perspective, I learned that abandonment was not something that had happened to me in some distant past but rather something I was living in the present. Its genesis was interesting but unimportant to changing my circumstances. Identifying the embodiment of my current behaviors—bracing, softening, extending, contracting—not only gave me tools for changing my experience in the present but also changed how I thought about and understood my experiences of the past. The past and the present come together in how we are bodied. We don't have to search for historical evidence to explain our behaviors, to make sense of ourselves. Everything we need is here, now, available to be experienced, learned from and re-formed through voluntary muscular effort. Our dilemmas are embodied. Formative Psychology explains how bodies are formed and the Bodying Practice gives us a way to experience and participate in our own personal forming. From this perspective, there is no mind-body split, separation, or continuum, only continual forming. Embedded in cultures dominated by this so-called Cartesian split, most of us confuse ourselves with our ideas of what we are and miss our Formative process. Stanley points us to how we are present and by teaching us how we form our own experiences, he helps us to find our own answers to our dilemmas.

I am so grateful to Stanley for his relentless pursuit of understanding things from a biological perspective. In this time, in our history in which dematerialization dominates, Stanley has given us a way to value form and physical experience. From working with Stanley, I have contemplated Einstein's theory of relativity as it applies to being bodied. I have experienced myself pulsating. And I have even generated my own pulsation. He has shown me how our bodies grow our brains and how the brain has crowned itself king and claimed the body as its servant. Descartes' famous words, "I think, therefore, I am" reflect that false coronation as do many practices of mind over matter that have flourished in the West. It is so deeply embedded in our psychological and world views, and we are so in love with understanding, that introducing the somatic, Bodying Practice and perspective of Formative Psychology to clients can be challenging.

Unlike Stanley, I often use the very language that has arisen from duality to explain this work to my clients (This is almost always unsuccessful: Don Quixote chasing windmills comes to mind.). Languageing experience formatively so that we speak from what is present is a practice in itself. Most of us have had the experience of doing the Bodying Practice and not knowing how to articulate our experience. Sometimes I can't tell if I am squeezing or stiffening, or identify what I feel when I make a particular shape. It takes practice knowing ourselves this way and talking about it. Stanley makes it seem easy, yet I know that it has not come without years of effort. He has formed a language to express organismic experiences, which are not accessible from the dualistic language of our social world. I am grateful that he has made this effort and lucky to benefit from his work. I do not have to be lived by our cultural separations of mind and body. I can experience myself as one of many living organisms in a vast biosphere working at the forming of a personal life.

Biography

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Forming My Presence as a Mother

Martha W. Knobler, MA, MFT

Abstract

In this article, the author applies the principles and methodology of Formative Psychology to her personal parenting situation as the mother of an autistic child. She describes in detail how her daily practice of Formative methods positively impacts her quality of life as well as her effectiveness in working with her son in his developmental therapeutic program. The author demonstrates how she applies Formative theory and methods to her own structure and particular parenting challenges. She relates finding meaning and satisfaction in shaping her life in this way.

Keywords

Formative Psychology – Parenting – Asperger’s Syndrome – Porosity – Rigidity

I work every day with how I organize myself as a mother. I depend on my ability to influence my shape and therefore my state and my behavior, in responding to the challenges of parenting. My wonderful son Jake, now 10, has Asperger’s Syndrome (a condition involving brain damage or differences from what is neurotypical, on the Autistic Spectrum[□]). He uses a great deal of ritualistic, repetitive behavior to organize himself; he loves talking with me about the same things, over and over. I have learned that the quality of my life hinges a great deal on how I help myself in large and small ways to manage my responses to him, and to my situation as his mother. At the same time, while the degree of challenge in parenting Jake is particular to the condition he has, much of what I do for myself using this work is relevant to other parenting situations.

There are many times in any given day when I need to make more or less form so that I am able to respond to my son with more of myself. Often when I’m very porous I will make a firmer shape, which enables me to take action, to keep his mealtimes or bedtime on schedule while he vigorously persists with his ritualistic interests. Or a very firm shape helps me respond in a definite way to his new “bigger boy” testing of the limits.

I tend to make a lot of form, rigidifying myself to get things done on a typical busy day. But when I am overformed, rigid-brittle, I recognize that I cannot receive and enjoy my son’s affection or enjoy his almost-constant enthusiasm. Sometimes I choose to work with my rigidity, doing it less especially in the neck and head, resulting in softening somewhat in those areas, and containing elsewhere enough to contact and support my tenderness, to be able to receive a sweet gesture he makes toward me. This forms a different shape, one in which I still have some rigidity—just enough to support my receiving and responsiveness, to really be *with* him.

Often, the demand to influence my state is from inside myself. I might experience a painful stiffness in the head and neck, and a strong pressure in the chest while hurrying during a typical day. This is an experience of feeling oppressed, and I want to help myself change my state. As I experience my discomfort, I realize that I am the only one doing this to myself. So I respond to myself by intensifying and de-intensifying the shape a few times until I have enough intimacy with myself to know which version of the shape I want to support for now. Once I have made a different version of the original shape, and worked to support/contain it, I am at home in myself in a far more satisfying way. And I can be present with my son, be playful or patient or firm with him as the situation requires. I can enjoy myself and him, and appreciate how he is present rather than keep him at a distance.

Doing this work gives me the satisfaction of living and forming my own life, rather than being lived by my son’s condition and the tasks I perform as his mother. It’s vital to me to form, to support my presence, to show up in my life.

Organizing a Strongly Rigid Shape

I am a porous person in a situation as a mother that puts many demands on me. This means that I often need to help myself by making a firmer shape to respond to those demands. Sometimes I need a strongly rigid shape for a brief period of time. When Jake gets sick and needs my help in the middle of the night, when he is acting-up/ignoring the rules and I am very tired, in a very porous state, I am grateful to be able to help myself.

Helping myself in these kinds of situations involves making vigorous form (without having to feel vigorous beforehand); and then later, being able to do the strong shape less, without collapsing, after the need for it has passed.

To make the strong shape, I basically rigidify my neck and head, and pull in and up in the belly and chest/ in my upper half, squeeze my gluteus muscles, straighten/stiffen my legs. I do this to a medium-high or higher intensity. This is a power move and sometimes I enjoy the experience of being this very firm person, this “Mother with a capitol M.” Sometimes, if the situation allows and I can take the time to fine-tune, I will do my rigid shape a bit less, choosing to support just a medium intensity. My son recognizes when I make one of these shapes: He will usually follow my directions right away when I form-up this way.

After the need for that degree of firmness has passed, I may experience the beginnings of an aching head and will want to re-organize again. To rigidify less without losing all form, I’ll do the rigid form I’m in just a bit more intensely to know it deeper, and

[□] Asperger’s Syndrome involves disorganized, disregulated brain functioning. People with Aspersers compensate rigidly: with stiff, ritualized and repetitive movements, thoughts and talk. They are recognized by a combination of very limited ability in self and social contact, and often high verbal, intellectual (sometimes savant) abilities, usually centering around one narrow interest.

then do it less two, three or even four times, pausing after each time to contain the less rigid form. Sometimes I overdo the disorganizing, and become too porous, unfocused. To help myself with this, I organize that porous shape more, then less, and make a couple of degrees more of firmness, settling with and sustaining one of them for a while. I'm grateful to be able to use voluntary effort to respond to Jake's needs, and also to my own.

In the Playroom: Forming a New Shape

I work and play with my son in the developmental program we have for him in our home. My times with him in the playroom are often times of delight, of closeness and of adventure with him. I enjoy myself. Working with myself formatively in this situation enables me to form the shapes of myself that I need at different moments in being with him.

On a daily basis, I make, adjust and re-make a shape with more form than comes naturally to me. I begin by experiencing how I am present in myself, in the room with him. I use my porous organization to receive both how Jake is present, and my own excitement about being and working with him today. I'll exaggerate my porous slump just a bit to know more deeply how I'm doing it, and then do it less, filling myself out. I support this changed shape by pressing into my sitz bones/pelvis, legs and feet. I always feel more able to carry out my plans in working with him as soon as I have done this; I have an experience of more support inside myself.

I practice organizing different versions of this shape, working to form it more reliably. In this new shape, I am based in the experienced firmness of the triangle of support between my feet on the floor, legs and pelvis planted on the child's size chair (just the right height to make this shape). Curving my lower back a bit, more or less supports this experience of being planted. The curve also supports my contact with my sweetness, experienced as quiet, deep pulsation in my belly/digestive tube. I keep my belly and chest motile enough to support receiving and responding to Jake (and myself) by periodically softening in the belly, diaphragm-chest and throat, then framing or containing myself with arms pulled downwards, hands resting on my thighs. I need some rigidity in my upper spine and head to stay focused, but not too much.

When I've made too much rigidity there I become impatient, instantly judging Jake or myself negatively. If I don't apply the voluntary effort to work with myself, but instead "relax" the spinal curve, I slump (collapse), and soon can feel that this work is too much for me, or Jake begins to run the play session. So as soon as I begin to judge (too much rigidity), or feel burdened or discouraged (loss of a supportive form), I know I can work with myself and make changes in my organization. I do so; even 10 seconds of deliberate effort can completely change how I am present.

The implications for working with Jake of my helping myself formatively in these ways are great, and simple. If I stay very rigid in the playroom, I soon find myself in a power struggle with Jake and no fun or learning will take place. If I am collapsed, I will begin to resent him and want him to behave in certain ways to please or help me; this also prevents the deepening of our contact that I am working for. But as I apply effort to organize the shape of my discomfort, do it more, less, more, less, then pick a version to contain and support, I come home into myself. This enables me to be present in ways responsive to myself and also to Jake in the situation. It is in this way that I help my son body a little less rigidity, and he learns to change his shape a bit and come closer to himself and to me. "Oh, I *really* love you," he says to me while hugging me in a tender way. He has learned to make degrees of firmness, to hug me this way; when we began working with him he had only fiercely strong hugging or flaccidity as options for hugging. Now I get to receive his hug, as well as my own experience of being present in myself.

Working with the Shape of Rigid-Porous Anger

Sometimes work with myself on an ordinary day begins like this: Jake asks, "So what do you think is REALLY the difference between a dianthus and a carnation?" This is the fifth time he's asked me this in the past half-hour, and he knows the answer; he is testing me. This is a way for him to organize himself. It's also fun for him to quiz people. I want to snap at him angrily. I want him to leave me alone. I experience that I am holding my neck and head, really all of my upper half, very stiffly as I make dinner. I am tired, and the holding is fairly extreme; I am numb to myself. In this shape and state any demand from the outside is too much. I intensify my stiffening for a moment, holding this long enough to experience a painful "bone-on-bone" sensation where cervical spine and head meet. My belly and chest wall are pulled-in, and I'm slumped forward in the shoulders and chest. Then I do it less. I experience the movement of my breathing filling me out. Now I know how much of myself I had recruited to make this rigid form, to stay on time with dinner preparations while conversing with Jake: A lot. I'm less of an automaton now, and I want more of myself back.

I do the stiff shape less again. I have a wave of warmth moving up through my belly/digestive tube, while I come down into my pelvis a bit. I contain this wave by carrying more of my weight with my legs and pelvis. Now I feel more present in the room with myself. I experience an achy fatigue, but also a foundation of support of my bones, and my warmth and hunger filling me in a sweet way from belly to mouth. I look back at Jake. Now I see his impish little look as he plays and waits for me to answer. I can respond to him now out of choice, and from the playfulness I feel as I look at him. I respond mischievously, and also challenge him to expand his behavior. With a twinkle in my eye I say, "Now that's the fifth time you've asked me that! Draw both flowers for me and show me what the difference is." He laughs and runs to draw them. We are both present together now.

Soon I realize I'm stiffening-up again; I haven't continued to support the shape I just made. This is OK, but I don't want to pay that high a price (the pain from stiffness, the numbness), and I don't need that much form right now. So I do the stiffening more, then less, then wait. I do it more, then less. I do this a few times. I'm in my belly life again, my sweetness. I've come home into myself. Now, to support this shape, to sustain myself, I press into my feet and straighten my legs a bit. I make a small outer shell by squeezing

my thighs/gluteus and drawing-in my arms towards my trunk just a little. Now I have a container for my pulsation. Now I'm here for myself, and not only dinner and Jake. It takes continued efforts to sustain this in this tired state; I will do what I can.

So I make an effort every now and then to enter into how I'm present in myself. This means that once to several times in an hour, I deliberately experience how I'm organized, and do whatever I'm doing more, less, more, less, leaving myself with an edge of extra support as I finish. Sometimes I press a bit into my sitz bones, feet and legs, without thinking about it. This enables me to do less gripping or stiffening above, in jaw, head, neck, and support enough form to enjoy myself.

Forming Responsive, Loving Action from Worry and Fear

I'm glad to be able to work with myself when I worry or experience fear about my son's future. I worry about how far he will progress developmentally, about what kind of adult life he will have. My worry can be triggered by a strongly autistic behavior, such as hitting himself on the head, as he was doing for some months about two years ago. Or I can be in the middle of a lovely day, doing anything with anyone, and find myself in an unwelcome shape and state, worrying.

The shape of my worrying is a compressed-collapsed immobility. I am bent over forward, my head is forward. My belly is sucked-in. My chest is slightly raised but also compressed. I am gripping myself: Upper palate is jammed down, with head likewise jammed-down, pressing into my cervical spine. If I hold this shape for any length of time my breathing is very restricted and I can develop a headache. I am immobilized as I have to recruit more and more of myself, deeper and deeper to sustain this. When I do this shape of worry less in steps, I begin to fill out and extend myself into a more upright shape. I receive waves of round, pulsating wanting, belly-to-throat hunger. I have a hunger for the life in me as I feed myself the basic movements of myself. This is a wonderful and rewarding experience. It then takes more work to fill the chest. I do this by following the at-first faint trickle of hunger moving up from belly to throat. Some practice back and forth and I can sustain pulsation in the chest too. I am always filled with gratitude for what I *have* after disorganizing worry. And when I turn my attention back to Jake, I am struck with how hard he is working to organize himself. I am filled with appreciation for his efforts. I experience how spirited and present he *is*; I am no longer concentrating only on his limitations. Now I move quickly to focus on what I now choose to do to help him with his development, or just to love him.

Sometimes I am afraid for Jake. This is a different experience, with a different organization from that of worrying (although there are similarities). I make this shape when he does something dangerous, such as running close to the cars passing on the street. I've also had this kind of response to reading articles in The New York Times on autism, or after answering a friend's question about my son's condition. I am engaged in an ongoing way in working with each of these shapes, so as not to be ruled by them.

The shape of my fear is more intense, more rigid and more localized (at first) than that of worry. I pull up, turn my head and twist to the right as well as pull myself in. I suck my belly in; my chest is raised up and also compressed so that I become short-of-breath. I am picture #3 on Stanley Keleman's startle chart*.¹ This has the potential to become a panic state if I don't work with myself.

When I work with this organization of fear and disorganize it enough, I experience deep waves of sweet pulsation, moving from belly through chest and up through neck and head. I am no longer afraid. I am moved, filled with love and compassion, sometimes with a sad quality, but fuller and sweeter than just sadness. At other times I am not sad, but my experience of deep, pulsatory fullness has a sobered, war-weary quality. This has become a familiar state. In this state, the echoes of the fear shape are present in muscle and bone: I have an experiential knowledge that I have been through something difficult but vitally meaningful, and of challenges ahead, as well. There is a strong sense of meaning, even of mission, to meet the challenges.

But this is also when the hardest work for me begins, of sustaining my formed shape. I now work to gather-in the edges around this sweetness, to make a container for myself, to sustain and grow this new shape. I experiment with different ways of doing this at different times, using my arms and hands to make a holding gesture out in front of my torso, or with rounded arms and cupped hands held in my lap, or with arms and hands pressing slightly down on my thighs (while sitting). This gesture/form joins with a now-familiar (I have grown this into a habit) pressing-into my pelvis and legs/feet, and curving my lower back (lordosis). This is the cutting edge of my work now: Practicing the forming, containing and supporting of my pulses of contained love and effort.

Conclusion

I wake up every day to challenges, and to the excitement of applying Formative practice to effect and deepen how I am present, whatever happens around or inside me. I wake to the promise of using myself this way, and practice formatively, embodying some of my possibilities. The promise and tangible results are always there, whether I apply effort wearily or eagerly. My son and I each have our rituals; mine involves influencing and growing my shape in the service of love. I enjoy the same promise and practice and reliable results in how I shape myself in my Formative work with clients, and in my marriage.

I begin with my shape of the moment, whether it is startle or worry or another variation of me, work with the shape, and then practice containing the pulse I harvest for myself. I take that reorganized shape into the room with my son, supporting what I have formed. Jake can feel the differences in my presence. When I am brittle, reactive, he tends to become more agitated, more intensely repetitive, while when I am contained and compassionate, lovingly and firmly containing him, he tends to more readily calm himself,

¹ Stanley Keleman, "The Continuum of Startle and Stress: From Assertion to Defeat." Center Press, 1985 (chart).
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becoming more present. When he is more with himself and with me, he is notably more able to take my direction, and can make significant progress in his development. These are the times when he can learn more of the gestures of contact I show him, the actions and words of interaction. There is a dramatic difference in the degree of success I have in working with him in his developmental and school program, depending on how I am organized.

And most importantly for me, there is a tremendous satisfaction in man-aging myself and Jake using this method. By applying voluntary effort to enter into HOW I am present, I receive clear and instant experiential feedback, repeatedly, daily, that I use in working with myself to adjust my shape, and to practice the new shape I am growing. This is a shape of firmly supported, contained sweetness and responsiveness, with a lower center of gravity, more endomorphically organized than what comes naturally to me. This shape gives me the ability to be responsive to my son and to my own needs as well. Formative practice gives me a way, every day, to use my own efforts to form a meaningful, pro-active life of my own, with far more personal satisfaction than doing what comes naturally would bring. The results are very different from disappearing or suffering on a daily basis because of my son's illness. People ask me, "How do you handle having an autistic child? You must be a saint!" The answer is that I apply voluntary effort daily, as I am able, and this enables me to live my life as a mother as an adventure.

Biography

Martha Weinstein Knobler, MA, MFT is a graduate of Sonoma State University (1976) and licensed marriage and family therapist (1982, California). She has worked with individuals, couples, families and groups for more than 30 years. A longtime associate of Stanley Keleman's work, having begun studying with Keleman in 1974, she is in private practice at the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California, since 1983. Email: mwk@lmi.net

Don't Panic, Get Curious

Josephine Dahle, MA, Ed.

Abstract

This is a personal account of managing an ectopic heartbeat with Formative Psychology. It includes the discovery of the extra heartbeat by an acupuncturist; initially reacting with panic; dialoguing with Stanley Keleman through workshops, email and individual sessions; using the Bodying Exercise, which lies at the heart of the Formative method, to contain panic and influence the body wall and to create more structure and form to support the heart function; learning to see the ectopic heartbeat as a friend, a sign to be listened to, respected and responded to; as a personal challenge in how to influence anatomy and behavior.

Keywords

Ectopic Heartbeat – Boundaries – Formative Psychology – Somatic Emotional Exercises

This article reflects my process and how I have lived my life over the past eight years, and that I have at certain times experienced as unwieldy, overcomplicated and unmanageable. I have overwhelmed myself with information, struggled to find a form and to create a structure that would work for me. I had to get past my initial and familiar pattern of looking for the approval of others; asking myself, “Would I be good enough?”

I became more internally referenced, curious and properly engaged in my process.

This internal dialogue led me to structure my writing around the communications I have had with Stanley by email, in workshops in Germany and Berkeley, and individual sessions between March, 2004, and the present day.

These dialogues over time have given me a container and a chronological sequence enabling me to manage my overwhelm.

Discovery of My Ectopic Heart Beat

In March, 2004, my acupuncturist picked up an extra heartbeat when taking my pulses. “You should get this checked out.” Up to this time I had felt proud of my “athlete’s pulse,” as she had previously described it.

I felt shocked and overwhelmed by fear and catastrophic fantasies. When I had disorganized shock enough to think more clearly about what I could do and where I could seek advice, I emailed Stanley.

SK: “My first response is do not panic. Start immediately to disorganize shock and fear...I would not respond with worry, only with curiosity...I would hold your form, not disorganize, and become porous. Small micro movements will help lessen the anxiety and give support to the heart.”

A Journey of Exploration and Information Gathering

I’ve always wanted to learn, even been driven to do courses, as experiential as possible, using myself to understand the information I was receiving.

But this was a journey of exploration and new learning at the deepest layer of my being, my organism ... my heart.

Since then the words “don’t panic get curious” have been part of my vocabulary almost daily, in my personal life and in my work with clients. A signal for me to stop, wait, interrupt what is happening inside me, perhaps allow something else to happen.

The discovery of my ectopic heartbeat was a “wake up call” and a turning point in my decision to learn to put myself first. It was an opportunity to look inside myself as an organism, to learn more about my body. I had lived most of my life picturing my heart and lungs with little real connection to myself. But I hadn’t known HOW.

Formative Psychology and Stanley’s support gave me the confidence that I could influence myself and not be helpless in the face of my body’s dictates. I started to engage in a new kind of dialogue with myself.

My Situation Around 2004

I had been under a great deal of strain for several years in managing my mother’s care in a home nearby. She had rapidly developing dementia and I found it stressful and challenging to hold my form in the consequent readjustment to her constantly new behaviors, and the gradual and painful loss of my mother as I had always known her. I was menopausal. I had decided to leave a therapy center that I had founded and co-directed for 12 years, choosing to work from my home, so ending daily contact with colleagues. I wanted to put my energies into deepening my knowledge of Formative Psychology and to grow more of a personal life.

These were all factors contributing to my loss of external boundaries and containment. Over the past few years I had periodically had physical symptoms, such as sensations of tightness in my chest, shortness of breath, extreme tiredness and exhaustion, difficulty breathing and nosebleeds. I noticed and ignored most of these symptoms. I had thoughts about not having long to live, nor at times did I want to.

A Brief Personal History

I am a maturing adult with a chronological age of nearly 60. I have two adult sons. I am the middle of three daughters, predominantly brought up by my courageous and extremely critical ectomorphic-mesomorphic¹ Danish mother, who couldn't tolerate sad or angry feelings. I pressured myself to care both for and about her at a very early age.

My Anglo-Irish father was absent geographically and emotionally. He was intelligent, entertaining, irritable, alcoholic and ectomorphic-endomorphic. They separated when I was 10, spasmodically reunited and finally divorced when I was 13. He died at the young age of 57.

My experience of life to the age of 11 was of constant change, anxiety, shock and transition—I had lived in 7 countries, had 5 nannies and gone to 5 schools. I developed a social layer. My work has been to grow a personal layer and life.

I had to be practical, responsible and work hard to support my mother. A strong inherited pattern was to DO, to be my mother's "little helper."

Being ectomorphic-endomorphic and brought up by a mesomorphic mother, my constitutional dilemma is to slow down, give myself time and order in my daily life and an internal structure and boundary for my thoughts and feelings. I have, like her, historically relied on the rigidity produced by drama, crises and criticism to give me form.

My Heart

My ectopic heartbeat was confirmed by a consultant cardiologist in June 2004. My heart was healthy but my pacemaker was making an extra beat, was "irritable" as he described it.

SK: "A bradycardia is a slowing down of the heart like an athlete's heart which is well trained does have skipped beats and is reactively normal, comes and goes and is not persistent. There is also a bradycardia associated with anxiety, the heart slows, then the extra beat. I do not think this is a sinus arrhythmia, but the result of a slow down in the heartbeat. However, the porosity can lead to some cardiac arrhythmia because of the loss of form and the heart having to switch gears."

It seems to me that my heart is demanding more order, regularity, structure, rhythm, more stopping and waiting.

My inner dialogue calls for more listening to myself, more time for preparation and recovery.

It alerts me to when I overwhelm myself, when I am too speedy, to my swings between rigid and collapse as a result of driving myself, to the pressure and density I can create when I do too much, or shock myself with impulsive behavior or when I think obsessively or overstimulate myself.

Given a rigid body wall and a weak, overly porous internal structure I want to give myself more structure to support my heart function.

SK: "I think that forming a structure that has more form, and is not rigid, and decrease the porosity so that the heart has less variables will be beneficial. The work will organize another pattern or mobilize another pattern in the pacemaker. I think there is a conflict between the maturing adult and the younger, structurally speaking, so as to form and sustain."

I am working on ending my strong pattern of caring for others before me and looking outside myself for my next action.

Near the end of an individual session where I had been talking about my mother and working on my pattern of collapse, Stanley made the statement "It's you or your mother." I heard these words as a major challenge though I initially felt shocked. This dialogue was extremely powerful for me and was a major turning point in learning to put myself first.

HOW Am I Supporting Myself in this Somatic Emotional Dilemma?

How am I choosing to respond to myself, to listen and be in dialogue with myself so I can live my life as embodied and fully as I am able?

I do daily micro muscular exercises using voluntary effort. I select from a library of Bodying Exercises that I have learned over the years. Which movement depends on my state and which pattern it would be beneficial for me to differentiate at the time.

For example I notice a painful tightening, a constriction in my left arm and fist as if grasping or holding on more tightly than is now necessary in my life. I stop, intensify the shape, make more rigidity with both hands, I then disorganize in increments making a more porous shape with a small rigid boundary.

This pattern of constriction is an action pattern or pattern of behavior of pulling away, turning away, of withdrawing into myself. It is partly and particularly strongly expressed by a constriction and a rotation in my left arm, my neck, the left side of my chest, my mouth tight and pulled down. At extremes of constriction, I find it impossible to speak, to find words. I become numbed. As I use effort to disorganize and wait, layer by layer, I notice my rigidity and criticalness, anger, disappointment, loneliness, a gradual

¹ See Body type in "Glossary of Formative Concepts (1996-2006) in this publication
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softening and an experience of warmth and love and expansion. I experience a fullness, and make a rigid porous shape. I have a firmness and can receive myself. In this shape I have a possibility of moving forward, of finding words to express my thoughts, feelings and experience.

In thinking about how else I could support myself to create more inner strength I decided to do some gentle weightlifting and to walk regularly.

SK: "You need to give the body wall more firmness which takes the load off the heart to give support that is costly because the muscles are not doing the work. The same with micro movement, to use more effort taxes the heart, again using firmness with the right effort. This support of the body wall may suggest that you re-evaluate all other approaches for a time, i.e., yoga, stretching, to let the build-up of tonus go on."

I now walk every morning, holding my hands in a rigid porous shape, which I experience as supporting and giving a structure to my upper body.

In my daily activity I stop more often to check with myself how I am in any situation, and make personal choices.

I choose to move more rhythmically and slowly when walking, outdoors and indoors, up and down stairs, biking, swimming, jogging and other physical activities.

I have noticed how obsessive or circular thinking gets in the way of taking action on any of these new behaviors that can potentially enhance the quality of my life.

I am more often aware of how I interrupt myself with a sudden idea and shock myself by an immediate impulsive action, then feel the resulting heat, inflammation or overwhelm.

Through the Bodying Exercise using voluntary muscular effort and other physical exercise, I can feel how in creating more body mass I become more considered, more deliberate, wanting to be slower.

At times I miss the familiar adrenalized excitement of starting projects and feel bored. I am learning to deepen, be slower, wait, be full with myself, and to make layers, to differentiate my patterns. I am learning to see my ectopic beat as friend rather than foe, as a sign or symptom of how I am using myself. I am learning to judge my rigidity less and to see it as necessary for my structure, to choose how much rigidity is necessary for what I want to do, assuming I have stopped and interrupted myself first, or practiced enough that it has become reflex behavior.

Having done the Bodying Exercise more regularly over the past few years I experience myself less fragmented, cut off from myself, divided between head and torso, above and below my diaphragm. I feel more solid, "whole," "joined up," rarely anxious, rigidly contracted and gasping for a fuller breath. My breathing is deeper and wider.

I notice that after exercise my heartbeat can go back to what used to be "normal." This sometimes gives me hope that this could become permanent. If not, I am learning to accept that my heart and I are settled into a different rhythm, or that maybe it comes and goes.

Sometimes in moments of quiet after doing the Bodying Exercise and after rhythmical physical exertion I can feel my pulses beating at different rates, yet in harmony through my body. It is a deeply satisfying and moving experience to be present with myself in this way. To know that I *am* a body, I don't just *have* one.

It is a strange and at times a disconcerting experience to see myself aging, yet to feel more alive, confident, in touch with myself, more in charge of my life than ever before.

I truly believe in and increasingly live this Formative way of seeing the world, inside and out, and as I grow in confidence, increasingly use it in my work with clients. I feel excited at understanding that anatomy is behavior and am moved at the power of Formative Psychology/philosophy to influence my life, and at the heart of it, the Bodying Exercise: I experience myself as a biosphere moving and existing within a biosphere.

I feel excited at the potential for learning and understanding myself at a deeper physical, emotional and spiritual level. I know now that no one "out there" can have the answers for MY organism. This leaves me with the very real responsibility for how I use myself, how I choose to live my life.

Biography

Josephine Dahle, MA Ed., is a UKCP registered and Accredited Psychotherapist with a private practice in Southampton, UK, working with individuals, couples and groups, personal and professional. She initially trained to be a teacher, working for 15 years with remedial, special, adult and parent education, training and counseling. With a growing interest in her relationship to herself and others, in 1987, she retrained to be a Humanistic psychotherapist at Spectrum Therapy, a Centre for Personal and Professional Excellence in London, England, specializing in Gestalt. Since 1993, she has studied with Stanley Keleman in Europe and America.

Growing a Personal Form

Carola Butscheid, Esq.

Abstract

Using voluntary muscular effort to influence inherited behaviors is a way to grow a personal somatic life. Giving body to these behavioral shapes is a new moment of existence. The active participation in our embodied existence generates joy, satisfaction, optimism, love and meaning for our lives.

Keywords

Voluntary Muscular Effort – Growth – Personal Form – Meaning

On the transition to the seventh decade of my life, in a post-menopausal tone, I chose the pyramid exercise that Stanley Keleman taught at the “Retreat for Somatic Practice” in San Rafael, California, in Autumn, 2005, as one of my regular exercises. In doing so, I initiated a developmental process. This developmental process embraces the voluntary muscular-cortical effort of intensity and duration and the reaction from the involuntary. It also includes my relationship to myself and to others, as well as my set of behavioral attitudes.

The Exercise

Form – Voluntary Muscular Effort – Intensity – Duration

I form with my hands a pyramid by putting my fingertips together. The outer sides of my hands form the sides of the pyramid. With voluntary muscular-cortical effort I begin gradients of pressure from outside in, compressing the inner space. In three steps of increasing intensity, I build a container that on the highest level is a firm capsule. Then, what happens in the hands also happens in the body wall. I create a boundary and a frontier between myself and the world. I form an enclosed space first in the hands and then in the whole organism. Holding the form in at specific level of intensity brings a gathering response into the pattern.

I start doing the exercise sitting down then standing, which brings the whole torso, chest, abdomen, pelvis and legs into the pattern. The sides of the torso and the legs form the sides of the pyramid. Then, I form the pyramid in my head.

As Stanley teaches, I am differentiating inherited patterns through voluntary muscular-cortical effort by forming layers in the structure of my body wall and by creating new synaptic connections in my cortex. The central factor in stimulating the forming of a new synapse is the stimulation of organismic attention. I need a challenge of something new, an inner asymmetry or something unexpected.

Voluntary muscular-cortical effort should, therefore, have markers that are based on experience and that can be identified by the cortex, markers to which the organism reacts with attentiveness. Stanley uses two markers, one for the intensity of the effort and one for the duration. Distinct, measured intensity and duration of voluntary muscular-cortical effort is the stimulus for growing new synapses or strengthening them.

The markers of my intensity—minimum, medium and maximum—give me an orientation for my efforts. As soon as I voluntarily do a step up or down the ladder of intensity, my orientation gets difficult and becomes diffuse. Therefore, inside the layers of intensity I create small edges of rigidity. Quite apart from the fact that every edge is a shape by itself, making an edge is an additional help for me in regulating the intensity. Through repetition over time, my orientation becomes more sure and confident.

Building up the intensity of the effort in the first round of the exercise and then holding it, I experience myself like cutting paths into a thicket with a machete: “Thwack, thwack.” With every stroke I assemble a group of muscles into the pattern. After a while, the paths are weeded and they become as easy to walk as streets. The experience starting my effort (local), of getting support from cortical activity (central) and then mobilizing the whole organism into the pattern (general) becomes stronger. The assembling phase in the specific level of intensity reaches a moment when there is an experience of fulfillment. It is like a coming home inside this form. It does not matter what form it is; it may be an unpleasant one but the experience of fulfillment still generates pleasure and satisfaction.

When I go down the ladder of intensity, my inside starts pressuring back; my brain starts swelling and my sight gets clearer and three-dimensional. The pictures on the wall in my office develop a depth. The pressure from the inside out can become so strong that it threatens to destabilize the outer container, so I create an edge of rigidity inside. The outside may involuntarily push back from outside to inside. I recognize that it is a pulse. If I now create layers in the pulse by using voluntary muscular-cortical effort, I experience a delightful dance of changing shapes.

For the duration of the effort, I create a marker by silently counting for 10 seconds. For me, counting is a big help in holding a specific level of intensity. Before using the marker of counting, I held a specific level until I experienced a reaction or until I recognized signals of being tired. When I have the impulse to give up or begin questioning myself, “What is this good for?” “What am I doing here?,” counting makes a form that is a good support for me.

Over time, the silent counting helps build a structure inside myself—it starts with a swelling in my head, throat, back of my neck and upper chest—I create an inner space. Lastly, I have the impression that the counting is gliding down and that I am counting with my throat. The structure of attention in the cortex is supported.

In the course of doing the pyramid exercise, I become clearer about the relationship between my inherited and my learned structures and the influence of my hormonal situation. For example, I want to do the exercise in the “right” way. I stiffen my neck. I am looking for the “right” attitude, I confuse myself; I bring my legs together, bend my knees a little bit, shrink myself and get

smaller. My inherited porous structure, plus the porosity of the post-menopausal years, result in a permanent struggle to hold a specific intensity. My constitutional layers have a conflictual dialogue with each other. The dialogue from my endomorph to my mesomorph is, "Support me!" From my mesomorph to my endomorph it's, "Be quicker, react quicker, I want to act!" and from my ectomorph to my endomorph and my mesomorph is, "Too much information from your dialogue. I cannot take so much."

The exercise fuels excitement. Sometimes I perceive this excitement only long after I finish exercising. When this happens, I must give a lot of attention to keeping my container intact in the course of the day. I have to become familiar with this growing intensity of feelings and sensations. Stanley: *"Familiarity is a process."*

Growing a Personal Form

By stepping up the intensity of the effort and then disorganizing, I am connecting inside myself and making an inner surface. I give the inside edge more rigidity and I start differentiating the inside surface. I start pushing the inside out. There is some exteriorization at the surface and I support it. When I support the structure of exteriorizing, it gives me an experience of "I am occupying my world, I am making a shape for myself." Stanley: *"We are in the early stages of 'my world.'"* To be in the world with a shape for myself, is the personalization of an instinctual act: **"I"** am sitting down, **"I"** am walking, etc.

Doing the exercise standing and forming the pyramid with my whole body generates a strong thrust of vitality. At the highest level of intensity, there is the experience of: "Strange"—"I am strange in this world"—"What am I doing here?"—"I am strange and this world is strange for me." Stanley: *"Separateness gives a certain amount of loneliness and strangeness."*

When I repeat this form, everyday situations appear strange to me. I feel separate and at the same time connected. It was an experience with which I had to become familiar and practice with my family and people close to me. This form is connected with a clear perception of how I react to other people and how I am regulating my outer wall. It is a source of pleasure and satisfaction to have a world of my own. At the same time, the question shows up, "How do I want to be in relationships?" This is the question for layers in this separateness.

Each time I do the pyramid exercise, each set of experiences gives me a different way of being in the world. I am building a library of shapes of being in the world. Each shape is another moment of a shape of existence. I am constructing the world piece by piece.

In the next weeks a paradox shows up: I am a separate world and I am inside this world. At the same time the outer world and the inner world are not different from each other. It is this outer membrane that creates my world, giving me the chance to form an inner personal world. This separateness also creates a desire to participate in the outer world. I realize that "belonging" has to be created. I want to cultivate this stranger and her interest in the world in which she lives.

After some weeks of exercising, I answer myself with a dream. After having worked with Stanley on this dream at the dream workshop in Solingen, I understand now that the emergence of this dream was a call of my inner tube for cortical assistance. In the dream, I hear somebody call my name. If I form, without speaking my name, and organize different intensities, I experience an inner tube, an inner surface that I can stabilize and differentiate with my efforts.

It is a call for the form of the "sovereign of my world" in this phase of my life to come into existence. This form gives me the experience of: "I am here—I form my world—I am in charge." At the same time, I experience a deeper, slower pulse that embraces the pulse of my heart and breathing. It is an experience of timelessness, of eternity.

The effects of my use of voluntary muscular-cortical effort to work with the pyramid exercise are that I am much more vital. Contact to others is less tiring for me, and I make contact more directly. Connections with others give me more pleasure and satisfaction. There is less wish or need to retreat and be by myself. I am separate and by myself even if I am with others. I recognize when I am tired. I have developed a stronger sense for the phases of my forming process. My slow moving inner pulse is more an experience of being at home than something that has to be accelerated. These effects come from a deeper level, not from the periphery. Now, I understand more deeply the personalisation of behavior; how voluntary muscular-cortical effort calls up the involuntary reaction and how, in regulating and influencing this involuntary reaction, I create something that has not existed before. Being separate and forming connections inside and outside of me seems to be the foundation of the joy of living. The key to everything is the forming of a container.

I am knitting, knitting a web of connections inside and outside of myself. This web is elastic and pulsing; it connects all parts of me and it connects me with the outer world and the universe. It connects me with those who were here before me and it connects me with those who will still be here, when I go home, and with those in whom I will be alive. Through bodying the shapes of my existence and co-bodying, I create meaning for my life. This active knitting of connections fills me with the joy of life; it gives me satisfaction and optimism. I am looking forward to the coming decade of my life.

Writing this down I am being moved by thick, warm waves of love and gratitude.

Biography

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“Soma and Its Production are Twins” The Formative Understanding of Literature and Formative Work with Poetry

Irène Kummer, PhD

Abstract

The various aspects of the Formative point of view of art are elaborated; in particular, the parallel between the artist creating works of art and the human being who is forming himself. Stanley Keleman, the founder of Formative Psychology, describes the forming of oneself—as “self-poem.” In this sense, myths—similar to dreams—are understood as “script[s] for bodying.” Thus, myths can be “borrowed,” by means of which these layers may be incorporated. In turn, these embodied layers desire to be differentiated and made personal by applying the Bodying Practice. Within this framework a Formative somatopoetology may be developed, which helps to grasp the various layers of literature as a “body,” consisting of different anatomic structures pulsatory patterns. In the same way, the form of a work of art, as well as the reception of art, are interpreted in a Formative way. This results in a multi-layered co-bodying, a reorganizing, a rewriting of literary works of art, which also redefines the meaning and function of art. As a conclusion, one may grasp that the somatic approach, situated between the field of literature and psychology, offers a new insight into literature and psychology. By applying the Formative somatic approach, one may contribute, at the same time, to literature and psychology and even combine these fields within a new framework, called Formative Psychology. (This is an abridged version of the article in the Festschrift for Stanley Keleman 2006.)

Keywords

Formative understanding – Stanley Keleman – Somatopoetology – Bodying
Literary Body – Psychology – Literature – German Literature – Paul Celan
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – Eduard Mörike – Art – Myths

Stanley Keleman, the founder of Formative Psychology, is a linguistic innovator, a researcher, and a poet. His research on the functioning of the human being may be described as precise, and his methodology, which is founded in anatomic biology, is clear-cut. On the whole, the form of his terminology and the stylistic devices he uses represent an entity. In a consistent way, Keleman, who is an artist himself, also developed a Formative perspective on how to deal with art. This perspective deepens the understanding of art and makes art available for the Formative process of the individual. In this article, I will take up Keleman’s Formative approach and apply it to German poetry. The first section deals with the question of how to develop the most important aspects of Formative understanding with regard to art and literature. The following subtitles are quotations from Stanley Keleman’s articles about literature, listed in the references at the end of this article.

“Art and Life Are in a Dialogue that Organizes Co-Bodying”

Art as a forming process in figures, sounds, movements and words seems to be a genuine desire of mankind. Across different cultures there are dances, myths, songs and images. We ought to question what art may offer us and what kind of role it plays in our lives. Formative philosophy provides a fundamental answer to this question:

Literature and art present us with the archetypes of human form, its character and structure. It offers us the stories and images of the different body shapes and destinies of the human enterprise in our relationship to nature, the cosmos and other humans. It speaks about the different states of human life with its accompanying feelings and experiences. It gives us a library of human somatic types, from childhood to old age. (Keleman, 1994a, 1)

The Formative understanding focuses on the spectrum of somatic-emotional shapes in their life-embracing dynamics, as they appear in literature. Formative understanding should not be considered a traditional interpretation, but rather a dialogue between art and life: “Art and life are in a dialogue that organize co-bodying.¹ We respond to these works and embody them, which reforms the story also. This is the way we bring into appearance our different somatic shapes over a life time” (Keleman, 1994a, 4). Thus, co-bodying constitutes the central issue of art and, at the same time, it enables a dialogue between two forms of expression that stem from the same matter. This dialogue with art should also be understood as a chance for life-long somatic-emotional growth and forming. That is, to create a Formative style of living.

“Art and Soma are Twins”

Stanley Keleman emphasizes the parallels between artistic expression and the self-forming of a person. The self-forming process is an artistic act, whereas the process of creating a piece of art ought to be seen as a self-forming process. In a similar way, twins can be identical and yet different. Thus, self-forming ought to be understood as a creative act, in which the terms “creative” and “poetic” become synonymous: “In this sense the body is a self poem with the wisdom we seek from our internal vista” (Keleman, 1990, p. 2). The human being who is self-forming him/herself as “self poem”—this is the poetic formula for the Formative perspective that Keleman expressed in 1986 as follows: “Formative Psychology, based on an evolutionary perspective, states that as humans we are an ongoing process, continually forming with voluntary muscular effort a somatic self in a personal self way” (Keleman, 1994b, p. 2).

¹ Leading body support or giving body to a process or person.

Stanley Keleman distanced himself as far as possible from the causal-deterministic understanding in which the human being is determined by genetics and socialization. According to Keleman, the Formative process is made possible by the innate “pattern of self-organization” (Keleman, 1994b, p. 2). Stanley Keleman not only distanced himself from the causal-deterministic understanding, but also expands the term of the artistic, for which the common denominator is the “forming” aspect. Each expression of the soma is seen as a creative process: “Every appearance in the world of the human somatic self’s expression is a poetic expression. Soma and its production are twins, making whole the somatic soul” (Keleman, 1990, p. 2). Therefore, the forming of one’s self and of one’s work derives from the same matrix, with poetry being an expression of the soma, just as voluntary self-organization is a poetic act.

In this context, Stanley Keleman’s way of thinking has an affinity with Alfred Adler, the founder of “individual psychology.” Adler understood the formation of the individual lifestyle as a creative-artistic and therefore Formative process in which the child forms himself with “playful joy.” Therefore the child is the artist of himself, and at the same time, he represents his own creation—even his creation is imperfect. On the whole, Adler was the first psychologist with a Formative view, even though he was not able to transfer it into somatic methodology. According to Adler, self-forming is rather an individual somatic myth, the identity of forming and of the formed. Adler also emphasizes that genetics and socialization have to be seen as components “out of which the child can build his lifestyle in a playful manner.” (Adler, Education, p. 5).

In Formative Psychology, the metaphor in Adler’s way of thinking undergoes a somatic specification. In the Formative understanding, the creative act of voluntary muscular self-forming is no longer a metaphor, but rather the somatic reality of mankind. The “artist” is not only a human being, but finally the living organizing process itself. One of Keleman’s poems “A Passing Wind: Embodiment’s Memories” ends as follows: “Being embodied is a cycle of rising, settings / The body is creation / Its creation is the ‘cortical mammal’ / Mankind’s self. / The body is its own god.”²

“Myth is a Script for Bodying”

Literature, one of the disciplines of art, emerges from our soma, from which more connections can be made. In a sense, art may be compared to gestures, by means of which we are in a dialogue with ourselves. The gestures enable us to bring our intraorganismic movements to the outside, after which we may add them to our own body, as a new Formative impulse. In this understanding, works of art should be considered an artist’s gesture. Those receiving a piece of art embody its gesture and use it for their own Formative process.

Artworks are comparable to dreams: They represent another form of dreaming. Thus, we dream ourselves in works of art. Artists dream, and the ones who receive art are dreaming with them, borrowing their dreams in order to embody them. A dream, be it a day dream or a dream taking place during the night, emerges from the organism, shows the inner cosmos with all its layers as well as the dialogue between these layers. In other words, literary works are twins of our dreams because dreams are rooted in our soma. What Stanley Keleman says about dreams is also valid for poetry: “Dream figures, they are a motile anatomy and an externalization of the body’s inner process. They meld and morph, dramatizing the body’s metamorphosis” (Keleman, 2003, p. 1). Moreover, “[d]ream figures are similar to gestures. They are the body’s inside coming to the surface” (ibid.).

This notion of dream figures is applicable to the formed overall gestalt of a piece of work, in which the figures represent, amongst others, one level of organization with which we can form a co-bodying process. The matrix of dreams is motile, even though the single dreams show different stages of the pulsatory continuum within this motility. Poetry can also have various qualities, but at the same time, it is always framed by the poetic form. Time and again, dream figures have a mythic quality so that they may be described as fighters, artists, mothers, lovers, or old people. On this level, they are also comparable to poetic figures, which in turn are rooted in the soma:

Myth is a story in a particular language that humans have devised for themselves. In relating a myth, one part of the organism can talk to another, and individuals can share their internal experiences with those around them. Myth is a way of perceiving inner and outer worlds. The body organizes sensations that arise out of tissue metabolism, and this is what we call consciousness. This somatic process is the matrix for the stories and images of myth. (Keleman, 1999, p. 5)

The somatic process being the matrix for myths, many stories we tell to others and ourselves could be considered a kind of myth, be it a collective or personal myth. Time and again, from one epoch to another, collective myths are newly formed, and are picked up, to some extent, by the poets who re-form these myths in an individual way. Myths tell us about the adventures of human morphogenesis and metamorphosis. There are literary works that contain a Formative perspective and others that express their failure or impossibility. We use these works in our personal Formative endeavor, as recipients of art through co-bodying. This does not imply that we merely identify with a figure, its layers and processes, or with the dialogue between figures, but rather that we form these aspects in order to personalize them. Stanley Keleman expresses this forming process as follows: “We respond to these works, embody them, which re-forms the story also” (Keleman, 1994a, p. 4). By re-forming ourselves, making an anatomic change, we also re-form the storytelling itself. However myths, as well as dreams and stories, only represent the surface of dynamics, because—

² Unpublished poem.
www.usabp.org

according to Formative Psychology—the layer of storytelling is a social arrangement that transfers the multitude of soma’s anatomic layers and the dialogue between them into the succession of a story.

Yet, the stories and images connected to them remain beneath the surface of the embodiments, which are not linear, but rather deep anatomic layers, constructed as a succession. Modern poetry does not follow this arrangement, but shows instead a great proximity to the structure of dreams in their original gestalt. Readers try to “understand” these works by transforming them into a dream-like succession: “What is the meaning of this poem?” The somatic-emotional “meaning,” however, is identical with its layered dynamics—exactly as with dreams.

If we accept the assumption that we can borrow external myth from other people, as one might borrow their night dreams, then working with myths can be organized in the same way as working with night dreams. By means of his Formative method, Stanley Keleman has offered psychological work with dreams a new basis, which is also valid for myths. Dreams are fleeting shapes that vanish if we don’t bestow continuity upon them. We narrate dreams and thus bring them to mind and embody them again. We do the same with the works of art we listen to or read over and over again, by giving them some duration. This is how literary works are transferred from one generation to the next.

In poetry, we encounter our human Formative possibilities, our challenges as well as our difficulties, troubles and cruelties, all of which are part of the human condition: “Literature gives us a library of human somatic types from childhood to aging. It offers us the shapes of emotions, from lust to love. Most importantly, it is a testament of human Formative possibilities” (Keleman, 1994a, p. 1). With the notion of a “testament,” Stanley Keleman also conveys the significance that is inherent in the tradition of art.

The Five Steps of the How Exercise in Our Literature

As I mentioned before, Formative Psychology and philosophy goes one step further. It teaches us how we can make the experiences of poetry and our own dreams available to us. This does not imply a mere repeated reading of poetry, of myths as verbal stories. Stanley Keleman’s statement, that “myth is a script for bodying, for action, for creating an inner cathedral, a somatic self. Literature also is a pattern of embodiment” (Keleman, 1994a, p. 1), which has an additional level, namely that poetry is used in yet another way as “script for bodying.”

The Formative approach lends us the instruments by which we may implement what particularly modern poets refer to as “composing forth”—and by which we may make the forming impulse of literature available to our own creative process. In doing so, we cannot only work with the figures of a poem, but also with its pulsatory form and dynamic. Since literary works are not our own individual dreams, we choose works that are important to us, works that we can continue to dream and make personal individually.

In literary works there are also moments that particularly touch us and to which we return over and over again. They create what Stanley Keleman described, in relation to dreams, as “luminous moments.” These moments generate a fluid state within us, out of which something new can arise. It is especially important to take up these moments. That is why we might cite the same phrases or wordings from a literary work. They give us the opportunity to form ourselves.

If poetry expresses an individual myth, we are able to form our own myth with its support—not only as a story, but as a somatic-emotional reality that can be embodied, differentiated and formed into a personal repertoire. The rearrangement of what we receive on the somatic level thus generates our own life-myth. This process also entails participating in the unknown, to which we expose ourselves in order to widen our view of the human condition and enlarge our personhood. This is a deeply human perspective with a concern that always centers in human growth.

Again, Stanley Keleman draws a parallel to the “twinhood” between art and soma: “The five steps of the Bodying Practice is our literature, our bodied experience, our temporal frozen motility. The somatic self’s story is our artwork. A workshop can use the How Exercises to embody our experience with the body of art and literature” (Keleman, 1994a, 6). At first it seems to be surprising that the process of the Bodying Practice (How Exercise) is described as “literature.” This stands in contradiction to all that we usually understand as literature. Yet, we ought to grasp that our self-organizing process is our artwork, and that we are the artists of ourselves and of the work of art we created through self-forming. We “write” ourselves by means of the How Exercise, which we apply to gestures, dreams and art.

Somatopoetology

In this section, I will sketch a somatopoetology within the framework of the Formative concept and its interpretation of art. This somatopoetology establishes the basis for the Formative analysis with different layers of literature.

The Different “Bodies” of Poetry

If poetry is soma’s twin, then it is also possible to speak of bodies of literature—similarly to Stanley Keleman who also speaks of “dreambody.” There are several “bodies.” First of all, there is the literary body that comprises several layers, from the body that embraces epochs to the body of the single poetical work. The work body is also organized in layers—in layers of formal and individual form elements with their pulsatory qualities, which are motile, porous, rigid and dense; especially in poetry. A further layer

of the suborganization of poems would comprise the single figures with their relationships, which are also to be seen as shapes along a pulsatory continuum from motile to dense, and along the different constitutional pulses. In the following, I will present an overview of the different layers in which somatopoetology is of importance. In the following section I will characterize the single layers that are listed below:

LITERARY BODY

- Work body/poetry body
- Entire literary body of a poet's work
- Entire literary body of an epoch
- All-embracing literary body of epochs

WORK BODY AS LAYERS OF PULSATIONS

- Literary pulse of different genres (constitutional pulse)
- Pulse pattern of a single work (constitutional pulse and pulsatory continuum)
- Poems/dramas: Pulse patterns of the verses
- Poetry: Pulse pattern of breath, "rhythm," sounds
- Pulse pattern of the entire work of a poet

WORK BODY AS STORY/MYTH

- Shape of the figures (constitutional-somatypical configuration)
- Behavioral pattern of the figures
- Development and metamorphosis of the figures along the process of action
- Relationship between the figures
- Entire process of a myth
- Special moments in a story ("luminous moments")

The Literary Body and Its Pulse Patterns

Epochs in general represent a kind of collective body out of which people may glean Formative impulses for their self-creation and, the other way round, they may participate in the process of the creation of an epoch. These effects are to be considered as reciprocal. Thus, we may also understand the sequence of artistic and literary epochs as a kind of collective body, which is forming dynamics. These patterns are comprehensive, and are not carried out by all artists. Nevertheless, they also have an influence on the patterns of an epoch and its changes.

There is yet another level. Within single epochs "a pulse within a pulse" may be found, which is similar to the pulsatory continuum of human beings. Each epoch—whatever its dominating pulse pattern may be—follows, in turn, its own pulsatory states, varying from less form to more form, from motile and porous to rigid and dense, just to become more liquid again.

Works of art are—as are dreams—phases in an artist's all-inclusive Formative process and are linked to the artist for good. They express the creative process of the artist. In most artists' lives, a basic pattern can be discerned, which at the same time, changes continually. This is what is implied by the term "style." It is, as Goethe said, the "duration in the change." Therefore, each work of art changes its position with each new work the artist creates. There is not only the body of art in a single work, but also the entire work body of an artist as a multi-layered general pulse.

Another level of pulsation, which is to be found in poetry, is the level of literary genres. Each genre represents another kind of poetic body. There are dramatic, epic and lyric shapes, and there are works that—even though they belong to a particular literary genre—offer qualities of other genres. One may make an attempt to classify genres according to their constitutional pulses. In that case, lyrics are most likely to correspond to the ectomorphic pulse, whereas dramas correspond to the mesomorphic pulse, and epics to the endomorphic pulse. In that case, lyrics are most likely to correspond to the mesomorphic structures pulse, and epics to the endomorphic structures pulse. The entire organism of a literary work is involved, but within this organism further pulse qualities may appear. There are mesomorphic poems and ectomorphic scenes in dramas as well as mesomorphic ones in epics. This depends on the way works are shaped. Likewise, they can be rather fugitive and porous, motile, rigid or dense. They can offer changing pulse qualities. Pulse patterns thus affect the poetic body and the representation of different characters in a play. In this respect, readers may use their co-bodilying with the works of different epochs as inspiration for their own Formative process.

Work Body as Story/Myth

In his book *Myth and the Body* and in his essays, Stanley Keleman mostly dealt with the layer of the work body, with myths in mind, and thus he dealt with the dynamics of figures. He illustrated in detail the process of formation of the figures in a work, illustrated by the Parsifal Myth. In other essays he also dealt with other myths.

This book is unique in that it expresses Stanley Keleman's entire Formative concept by means of a myth, without imposing foreign categories onto the myth. It is rather about a re-formation of mythical story-telling to its somatic-emotional and Formative base.

Myth and the Body shows how other myths and stories may be understood from a Formative point of view at the level of figures and how they may be used for one's own Formative process. Since Stanley Keleman illustrated in detail the dynamics of figures by means of myths in this book and in his essays, I will give special emphasis to the other layers of works of poetry. Nevertheless, the different layers that I have described in the overview belong together and form an artistic unity.

The Work Body and Its Pulse Patterns

In order to describe the form-building and pulsatory qualities of a poetic work body as the expression of an artist, I take lyric poetry as a starting point, in which the different layers of pulse patterns can best be demonstrated.

Each poetic work as an expression of the creating process of a poet is a pulsating process, with each pulse belonging to its genre, with the formalised pulse of stanzas, verses and rhymes connected specifically to each individual pulse of a work. The same rules apply to dreams: They have a constitutional level and belong at the same time to one or more of the four pulsation states. That is to say, an ectomorphic poet may create mesomorphic works or characters, whereas a rigid poet may create porous or motile works or characters and thus establish an embracing somatic cosmos of creative possibilities. In the following, I will try to focus on the somatic qualities of poetical works, in the space of poems. Poems—as well as other poetic works—can be ectomorphic or maybe porous, as is demonstrated, for example, by the poem, "Farewell" by Rilke. Various poems of late Romanticism are also of porous or fluid quality in the sense of a pulsatory pattern. Many poems by Schiller offer a mesomorphic-dense quality, especially the poems he wrote in classical style.

The diversity of pulse patterns structures itself in the dialogue between formal and individual pulse. Meters, for example, have a different pulse quality and are, moreover, applied differently by various poets. We co-pulse when reciting poems—as readers we follow, for example, the constitutional pulse that has different qualities in the different layers: The ectomorphic, blazing pulse of the nervous system and the skin, which is similar to fireworks, and the linear, powerful pulse of the mesomorphic layer of our skeleton and muscles, or the deep and slow endomorphic pulse of our entrails. Whenever we swell with a poem, we become porous or give ourselves a rigid or dense form. We melt, isolate ourselves or move between the two poles, while experiencing a semi-porous and semi-rigid intimacy. Thus, we dream along with poems, as we fulfill our nightly dreams and repeat them in our memory, to make them fertile for our own forming process on the base of co-bodding, with the help of the Bodding Practicing. We enforce our own structures' pulse patterns or we can learn to organize—within our habitual structures' pulse pattern—to make them more or less rigid, dense, motile or porous layers.

The complete work of a poet can also be seen from the same points of view. It is an entire body, which follows in general the process of metamorphosis that human beings fulfill during the different phases of their lives. Formative Psychology offers a concept for the understanding of this process: Stanley Keleman worked out a precise phenomenology for the qualities of the alpha- and mature adult, which he has published in various articles. This process of growth can be seen in the different figures of a literary work as demonstrated in *Myth and the Body*.

We may also find this process in lyrics in the form of the changing pulse pattern. An impressive example is Goethe's entire work. We recognize the fulminating, motile departure in his early poetry of "Sturm und Drang" and the intensification of the form in Goethe's classical period, which was created out of the relationship between Goethe and Schiller. It started as an intra- and interorganismic dialogue, which is exemplified in Schiller's letter to Goethe and that represents a "mystery of completion."

Schiller's death coincides with Goethe's transition to the "mature adult." His works became more fluid and later on even more porous. Finally, we find the porosity of his poems in advanced age, such as the "Dornburg poems." They are similar to Chinese calligraphy, lightly created, porous-transparent. They have a light pulse of silence and vibration and, at the same time, an entirely porous quality.

The differing pulse of the poems is connected to the pulse of the single phases in a human being's life, even though there are in each phase also other forms of pulsation, corresponding with the particular dynamics of a poem. The quality of the pulse may also vary within a poem. When dealing with poetry, we may recall our own layers of growth—be it by means of figures or by means of the pulse quality of a poem. Thus, we may not only recall our different layers; we may also continue to create our layers and we may establish the common ground for a dialogue between these layers.

Pulses within Pulses—Deep Layers of Lyrics

Having illustrated the pulsatory rhythm of the body of literature and work, I would like to deal in detail with the deep layers of poems, which may be seen as pulsatory pattern and as pictures.

Poetry is “breath,” a respiratory wave, rhythm. In Paul Celan, the breath of a poem is described as follows:

Ein Wurfholz auf Atemwegen...

A boomerang, on breath paths...

In his breath, in his forming strength, the poem is ejected with a tremendous strength of form.

The poem is a “*breathcrystal*,” the paradoxical unity of firmness and flowing, of form and unformed.

Rilke reverses these relationships. Breath is thus turned into an invisible poem:

*ATMEN, du unsichtbares Gedicht!
Immerfort um das eigne
Sein rein eingetauschter Weltraum. Gegengewicht,
in dem ich mich rhythmisch ereigne.*

*Einzige Welle, deren
allmähliches Meer ich bin..*

***BREATHING, you invisible poem!
Ceaselessly going round your own being
pure exchanged world space, counterpoise,
In which I rhythmically reclaim myself.***

***Solitary waves, whose
Gradual sea I am...***

This poem is very close to Stanley Keleman’s statement that we as human beings represent a “self-poem.”

Poetry being breath, and breath being poetry, we have again arrived at Adler’s and Keleman’s Formative idea. The pulsation that is at the heart of poetry, is a lived happening. The breath is—as Rilke puts it—a process, *in dem ich mich rhythmisch ereigne* (“in which I rhythmically reclaim myself”). However, poetry is also a ritualized rhythm, bound to a meter that is handled more or less freely or rigidly. Poetry ought to be seen as sound, for poetry has its own music. Language should not be merely seen as carrier of contents; language should be considered as standing for something eminently somatic.

Language unites flowing and firm qualities, which are of importance especially in poetry. The “appropriate word” is also to be understood in a somatic way. It deepens the co-bodying. The “linguaging” is therefore an integral part of poetry.

Modernity elucidates the complexity and the somatic quality of art and poetry in a surprising fashion. Many modern poems do not offer an identifiable “content,” for there is no longer an immediate reference to a known reality. The poems create, first of all, reality as a multidimensional, pulsatory event. Especially, modern lyrics do not have a precise succession, but are meant to bear reference to the simultaneity of all the events taking place in the poem. Wherever a sequence is expressed, only the topmost layer of its dynamism may be found, in the depth of which other rules are adhered to. Modern poems have the tendency to isolate their various layers, that is to say, that some layers are given more emphasis whereas others are given less emphasis, be it the layer of the breath, of rhythm, of sound or articulation, of semantics or syntax, or of imagery. Thus, the complexity of the human being is again illustrated; it expresses a reality of our somatic existence. By co-bodying with a literary work we have the opportunity to encounter our own somatic, multi-layered state, to use it in a Formative way and thereby to enter a new relationship with the work of art and with ourselves in a Formative way.

The Artistic Essence of Art as a Challenge

This section deals with the peculiarities of poetry and with the function of poetic form with respect to the Formative concern.

Formative Reception of Literature

Until now we have discussed the question of how we relate formatively to the different levels of poetic works, how we co-body with them and include them into our own Formative process.

I shall now present a spectrum for dealing with literature in general. Do I want to distance myself in order to keep the general overview, to collect academic insight and comprehend coherencies—and how do I carry out this process with my body? Or do I want to receive a work as a whole? How do I realize this? While carrying this out, am I passive or active? Do I let myself be overwhelmed, do I identify with the work or do I form an intimate relation of half-rigid, half-porous quality with it? How can I keep up the excitement that is evoked within me? It is our aim to be able to change between different somatic organizations, to develop a spectrum with which we can relate to literature or a certain work in various ways. We may also choose to which works we want to respond utilizing which embodiment, and influence these through differentiation. It is important to protect oneself from being inundated or overwhelmed, to create a container, to organize borders and to choose with which works we wish to co-body. In other words, we may evaluate which works have a Formative quality for us personally, whereas the Formative quality of other works turns us away from them. The crucial point here again is—as in every Formative process—to create the possibility of influencing the soma's shape with itself, its intensity and duration.

The Artistic Form as a “Container”

We have dealt in detail with the poetical body in its different aspects and with the somatic response as well as with the possibilities of Formative continuation of “writing” poetry, in the sense of self-creation. But what always holds us when we have succeeded in reading a poem is an experience of coherence that is superior to all of the contradictions and disruptions. We might be startled; the poem might express desperation and make one think of the abyss. The poem might even be moving along the borders of silence, which is true, for instance, in the poetry of Paul Celan. Yet, what always carries us through is the form of the poem. With that, it testifies against what it might express on another level. Even if the poem deals with downfall, the form holds the poem together. This paradox occurs again and again. This successful form is a compass that holds us within our own form and allows us to engage in a poetic work without losing ourselves. We perform the poem in accord or dis-accord. Here the unique possible Formative process for us as readers ignites. Held by the form, we can engage in the utopia of the poem on a path into the pathless, into something new that can only gain its form within ourselves.

Many poems present themselves—as mentioned above—on the level of history, similar to the way in which dreams are remembered, successively, as a sequence. And that is only the topmost layer. But we can, at any moment, stop this succession and then the deeper layers of a poem open up to us. Bad poems get stuck in a schematic succession and at the end the emptiness of corroboration and the replaceable appears. Artistic poems do not give us this shallow certainty. We always have a choice—not merely the fundamental choice of reading a poem, of engaging ourselves in reading the poem or putting it aside. We have the choice, or the freedom, granted to us by the shape of the poem. It gives us the foothold of the formed and opens further spaces of uncertainties in which we encounter unimagined layers of ourselves and can make the poem a process of our own. The certainty of the poetic form breaks into unexpected deeper layers again and again. Of course, we can either resist this process or expose ourselves to it. If we engage ourselves to read the poem, the activity ought to be compared to our handling of dreams. Poems can lead us onto the path of a self-creative process. Thereby it is not only about a pleasing or irritating experience. An experience alone is not yet a self-creative process. We often notice that a poem does not “let us go”—we read it over and over again. By reading the poem time and time again, the somatic anatomic shape on a macro or micro level shifts, and new dimensions show up. The poem strengthens its track in us and differentiates its track at the same time. Usually we speak about understanding the poem more and more deeply, without realizing that the poem is forming us—or better, strengthening and deepening our own forming impulses. As a young person, I learned the entire *Faust I* by Goethe and hundreds of other poems by heart, so that I could live with them and have them present at any time. I could recite them; they were my companions. They carried me through my crises, helped me to form myself—without being fully conscious of the process. I formed myself through them. Later, as a young teacher I passed this forming force of poetry on to my students. I would now like to concretize these thoughts with the example of the artistic dimension.

The Artistic Dimension

When we encounter poetic works we are also confronted with the dimension of the artistic essence. For example, when we read a poem, we see a picture and are touched, worried or fascinated. It can be like an electrical shock that goes right through us. Art stands at a right angle to the accustomed. Everyday normality confirms us, may satisfy us, but it does not ignite a Formative process. The media produces so many products for entertainment that we take a look at and forget these products again or memorize them as confirmations of our views. They can indeed activate our emotions, but they do not set down any new tracks in our brains—they simply confirm the existing ones. Trivial literature replaces the arrangement of references of signs, their complexity and their mutual relation with direct emotions and the transferability of structures with few unvarying constellations. This makes a personal forming process in conjunction with the work impossible.

Great artistic works do not simply meet our expectations—they offer new, unexpected perspectives. Artistic works defy public taste. They become “indigestible.” They do not repeat the already known but form something new, by which a process sets in. At this

stage, we are situated in the center of the Formative concern. We ought to question whether the work gives us a Formative impulse that we can absorb. Another question is: How does the preoccupation with an extraordinary artistic work differ from one's preoccupation with a mediocre one? In an artistic work the elements of the depiction have to be coherent, yet the depicted does not have to be harmonious. The depicted has to be transferable, but its structures are not bound to reality but rather, illuminate every similarly structured reality. Poetry shows that reality is a product of our vision and interpretation, of our process of embodiment. Reality in truth is our relation to reality. From the viewpoint of art I would like to mention the following four criteria that are important from a Formative point of view:

- The deeper, more complex work is considered more important than the mediocre work. This corresponds to the multi-layered nature of our organism and with the dialogue between its layers.
- The work with more realistic or worldly content in the broader sense is considered more important. This corresponds to the aspect of the embodiment of our existence.
- The formed work is considered enriched. This corresponds with the dynamics of the somatic forming.
- The forward-looking work that broadens one's horizon is considered more copious. These kinds of works communicate a Formative perspective.

The dynamics of receiving a work of art is converted to how a person organizes it as the work of art inside themselves and the resistance of the structure of the text (e.g. the grammar, the meter, the cadence). Trivial literature wears itself out in the cathartic function. Formative importance is only attached to art, which has several meanings. Art does not merely happen to us; we have to participate in its process if we really engage ourselves to understand it. Preoccupation with art implies that we *do* something. Thus, it is not sufficient to simply have an experience, for we have to keep track within us and absorb the forming impulse, to strengthen it. This happens by reading a work of art again and again, by looking at it, listening to it, continuing to integrate it into one's own Formative process. However, the artistic work is not just "material" for our self-embodiment. It also has its own resistance through which we may grow as well. It is an ongoing multi-layered dialogue with the artistic work and, therefore, with ourselves.

"Borrowing" Poetry for Personal Growth

I will now elaborate how the Formative perspective is shown in poetry and how we can absorb it for our own Formative process.

Designing Transitions—"...or does one rise still unborn in [one's] heart?"

As a Formative step, transitions are linked to growth, to the process of metamorphosis. In a transition, a process of incubation is carried out, in which a state of less form is turned into something new. There are different levels of transitions. There is the transition towards new behavioral patterns, or the transition from nighttime to daytime existence and vice versa. And,, there is the transition towards a new life phases. I have chosen a poem by Eduard Mörike that illustrates the process of transition. It describes the transition from nighttime into daytime existence. In this transition a broad spectrum of nuances may be encountered:

An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang

*O flauenleichte Zeit der dunklen Frühe!
Welch neue Welt bewegst du in mir?
Was ist's dass ich auf einmal nun in dir
Von sanfter Wollust meines Daseins glühe?*

*Einem Kristall gleicht meine Seele nun,
Den noch kein falscher Strahl des Lichts getroffen;
Zu fluten scheint mein Geist, er scheint zu ruhn,
Dem Eindruck naher Wunderkräfte offen,
Die aus dem klaren Gürtel blauer Luft
Zuletzt ein Zauberwort vor meine Sinne ruft.
Bei hellen Augen glaub ich doch zu schwanken;
Ich schliesse sie, dass nicht der Traum entweiche.
Seh ich hinab in lichte Feenreiche?
Wer hat den bunter Schwarm von Bildern und Gedanken
Zur Pforte meines Herzens hergeladen,
Die glänzend sich in diesem Busen baden,
Goldfarb'gen Fischlein gleich im Gartenteiche?*

*Ich höre bald der Hirtenflöten Klänge,
Wie um die Krippe jener Wundernacht,
Bald weinbekränzter Jugend Lustgesänge;
Wer hat das friedenselige Gedränge
In meine trauerigen Wände hergebracht?*

*Und welch Gefühl entzückter Stärke,
Indem mein Sinn sich frisch zur Ferne lenkt!
Vom ersten Mark das heut'gen Tags getränkt,
Fühl ich mir Mut zu jedem frommen Werke.*

*Die Seele fliegt, soweit der Himmel reicht,
Der Genius jauchzt in mir! Doch sage,
Warum wird jetzt der Blick von Wehmut feucht?
Ist's ein verloren Glück, was mich erweicht?
Ist es ein werdendes, was ich im Herzen trage?
- Hinweg, mein Geist! Hier gilt kein Stillestehn:
Es ist ein Augenblick, uns alles wird verwehn!*

*Dort, sieh! am Horizont lüpfte sich der Vorhang schon!
Es träumt der Tag, nun sei die Nacht entflohn;
Die Purpurlippe, die geschlossen lag,
Haucht, halb geöffnet, süsse Atemzüge:
Auf einmal blitzt das Auge, wie ein Gott, der Tag
Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel!*

On a Winter Morning before Sunrise

*Oh dark dawn time, oh light-as-down dawn light!
What have you done to me, what sudden glow
Of gentle joy in living moves me so,
What new world stirs within me at this sight?*

*My soul is like a crystal, though I seem
Untouched by day's false brightness yet; my mind,
Still as still water, moving like a stream,
Is opened at some magical command
To nearby powers of wonder: from that ring
Of clear blue sky they are called, my senses visiting.
My eyes are wide and yet I sway with sleep;
I close them, lest this precious dream should fade.
Into what fairy realms do I gaze so deep?
These many-colored images and thoughts, who bade
Them come to me, bright presences, what made
Them plunge and glide into this heart of mine,
As in the garden pond gold fishes swim and shine?*

*Two sounds, now the shepherds piping clear
As round the manger on that wondrous night,
Now the glad songs of vine-crowned youth I hear;
But through my poor walls who has brought them here,
This peaceful throng, these envoys of delight?*

*How I am strengthened, and with what new joy
I steer my thoughts upon a distancing course!
I drink the morning marrow's earliest force,*

My will grows bold to every good employ.

*My soul flies up, far as the endless skies,
The spirit exults in me! But say,
What softening sadness still makes moist my eyes?
Do I recall a lost content, or does one rise
Still unborn in my heart?—Up, my soul, and away!
Let me not linger here: a moment made
What I have seen, and now it all must fade.*

*There, on the horizon, look, the curtain lifts at last!
The day is dreaming that the night has passed:
His crimson lips lay closed, but now, half parted,
Breathe out a sweetest fragrance; suddenly
The great eye flashes: like a god, oh see,
The day leaps forth, his royal flight has started!*

This poem shows not only a possible transition from nighttime to daytime existence but also the dynamics of the incubation phase, in which a new layer of an anatomic self is generated. Stanley Keleman describes the incubation phase in his book *Embodying Experience*:

The dialogue of neural orders, visual and memories and muscular action slowly creates a silence. It is, in many ways, an incubation. In this pause I find a natural whirlpool of excitement, deafening silence of feeling, or an upwelling of electric currents that warm and melt. The hormones of the brain arouse images of new experience accompanied by memories of the past (p. 42)... Images, feeling, sensations and ideas well up. This is a peaceful place. You have an inner sense that a direction is going to come. You are between what has ended and what has not yet arrived, in a pregnant place (p. 45).

Various aspects are particularly effective in Mörike's poem. At the same time, there is a luminous moment, an open and flowing state, a stirring event and the emergence of a new world. The poet compares his soul to "a crystal, though I seem untouched by day's false brightness yet." It is the virginity of the new that presents itself as a "somatic soul." It is a state with which no experiences are yet linked. Then pictures and emotions emerge in a dreamlike state, for dreams are the language of the organism. Memories of one's own youth arise that are, at the same time, a reference point for the young and delicate character of a personal layer, which is newly formed. This also manifests itself in our dreams: "Does one rise still unborn in [one's] heart?"

In this state of "self-filling" (Keleman, 1987, p. 29), a new form emerges as a promise and gives "a feeling of delightful power" that is linked to melancholia, which is disbanding the hitherto existing. Towards the end, one of the pictures follows that has always stayed with me:

*Die Purpurlippe, die geschlossen lag,
Haucht, halb geöffnet, süsse Atemzüge:
Auf einmal blitzt das Auge, wie ein Gott, der Tag
Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel!*

*His crimson lips lay closed, but now, half parted,
Breathe out a sweetest fragrance; suddenly
The great eye flashes: like a god, oh see,
The day leaps forth, his royal flight has started!*

These lines express how I witnessed—in various workshops by Stanley Keleman—the birth of a new, unknown layer at the end of the incubation phase of the How Exercise. Out of the smooth softness of the transition in which the new is yet unformed, the nascent form breaks through with all its force. The event of breaking through is carried out with a vehemence, which may be compared to a woman's labor pains, when bringing her child into the world. This moment has something irresistible, similar to "the royal lips." Yet, this moment has the power to overwhelm us, by which we risk that the new cannot be embodied into the world. At this stage, we may continue to form the poem as our self-poem by giving ourselves somatically a container to hold the new motile layer coming into being. Keleman's presence represented a further container for me, since in his holding and receiving strength I could receive myself in a new form. Thus I learned, not only to let new anatomic layers be created during the incubation phase, but to continue to form these layers intra- and interpersonally, comparable to the pulse of giving and receiving, and to include them into my life.

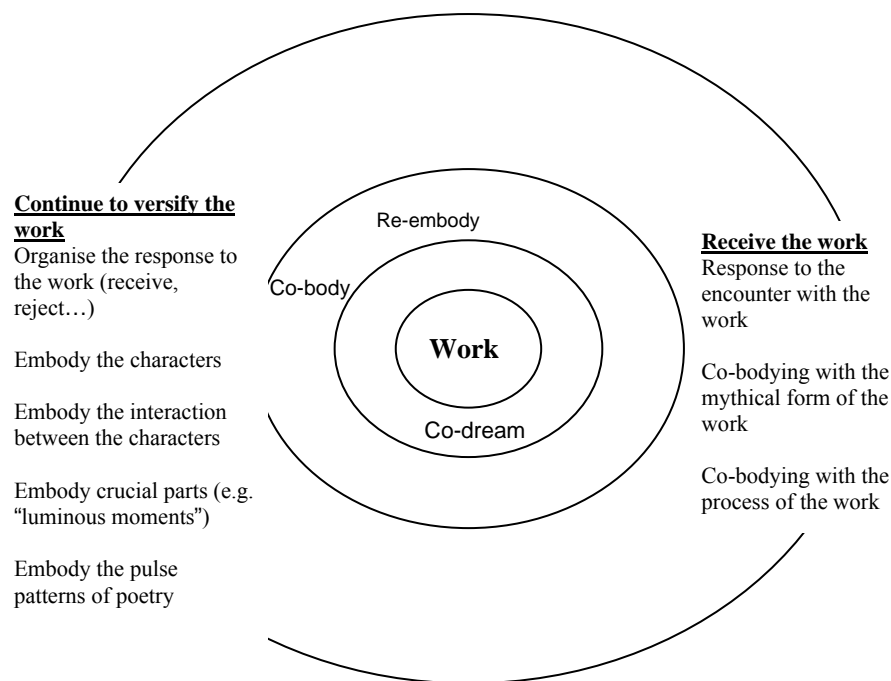
Conclusion

Every poem, every narration, every poetical work is a story, a collective or individual myth that I can accept, co-body, reject or defy. I can identify, or even fuse with the text. I can take part in it and thus experience an expansion that can be either blissful or painful. Thereby I am confronted with my own somatic-emotional and mental response. This level goes along with the pulse of giving and receiving and the corresponding counter-patterns. We get into some form of dialogue with these works and thanks to the former, we may compose our own myth not only in a linguistic way but also as a somatic gestalt.

Since we always tend to respond to language and therefore to literature in a somatic way, the whole body is engaged in this act. Similarly, we respond to the given structures of a literary work such as verses, rhymes and rhythms. The person organizes a body shape that is the background for their perception. On the one hand, we have to organize a container for the new excitement generated by the interaction. On the other hand, we learn how to give ourselves a shape and a foothold, whereas, on the other hand, we learn how to form a container for our excitement or how to “rhyme” with ourselves.

In a work of art, certain points may strike us and may come to represent “luminous moments,” as in our own dreams. All in all, literary works are myths that can either represent a Formative view or no Formative view at all. By means of our experience with them we may create a Formative process. At this stage, there are different possibilities for Formative work, since Formative myths offer a possible vision for one’s own Formative process. Thus, we may embody particular characters, the connection between these different characters, the pulsatory patterns of the poem. Once we have embodied these aspects, we may work with these different layers by using the Bodying Practice in order to expand our repertoire and to personalize the text we have read.

Our form of participation and receiving may be comprehended. By means of the “borrowed dream” it is possible to discover one’s own levels of embodiment. We may deal with a literary work as we would with one of our dreams so that the individual Formative process may set in. We draw the conclusion that literary works represent a chance for one’s own process of growing by applying the Formative view and method.



Zurich, November 17, 2006

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Biography

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Organizational Crisis: A Formative Perspective

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Abstract

A brief organizational history and view of the uses of Formative Psychology in successfully dealing with an organizational crisis and stabilization.

Keywords

Ending – Formative Psychology Applications – Humanistic Psychology
Organizations – Spectrum – Transitional

Spectrum Therapy is a humanistic and existentially based psychotherapy practice and training organization accredited by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy. We founded Spectrum in 1976, and subsequently two other directors joined us (one of whom, Maggie McKenzie, is also actively involved in working with Stanley Keleman and with Formative Psychology). This year we celebrate our 30th birthday.

From when we two first started to work together, we were both interested in increasing individual responsibility within the therapeutic process. We saw responsibility not as an end result of therapeutic work but as a necessary part of it, in fact a primary ingredient. We understood that taking responsibility was directly linked to increasing people's capacity to be self-determining and we focused our attention on clinical approaches and methodologies that supported this view. We identified with a humanistic and existential frame of thinking.

Humanistic psychology appealed to us on the basis that it respected the relationship people had with themselves and did not support a hierarchically bound therapeutic relationship. Humanistic psychotherapy emphasized dialogue and exploration as the basis of therapy. Existential psychotherapy emphasized a functional view of how a person lived their day-to-day life and the dilemmas they experienced.

We formed our approach to working with people intuitively and with much thought. We sought a variety of teachers and studied many therapeutic approaches. In the early 1970s, Jenner met Stanley and sponsored his work while she was running a center in Holland. In the mid-1970s, we bought Stanley and his work to London. The appeal to us of Stanley's work was that it embodied values that were important to us and his practical methodology held a key to what was missing in our work: The way in which to teach a person step-by-step how to directly influence and interact with their experience and how to use the body's experience as the basis for self-knowing.

There was something about Stanley's work that eluded us. We had been following a set of psychological ideals and not understanding that anatomical structures generate experiences, that emotional experiences existed within and were part and parcel of anatomical structure and that emotional anatomy relates form to feeling. We understood intellectually that the body was the basis of experience, but had been trained to interpret and understand psychological experience in a cognitive and disembodied way. We knew Formative Psychology worked from personal experience and we applied ourselves to continue studying and practicing. It was many years before it became clear to us that we had been trying to apply a psychological frame to an anatomical process.

During this transition of shifting from a psychological to an anatomical paradigm we felt unformed and experienced disorientation, frustration, confusion, helplessness and feelings of inadequacy. However, we had experienced enough value in practicing the methodology to sustain us through the transition and over the years the main thrust of our work and the work of our organization has become Formative.

One of the most unexpected and successful developments in our work with Formative Psychology occurred in 1999 when our organization went through a difficult time. One of four directors chose to leave in a sudden and unexpected manner. This event and its effects were a great deal more far-reaching and complicated than is possible to share in this paper, but the event and its effects left many of our clients, trainees and practitioners, as well as the core staff and remaining directors, in a state of bewilderment and shock. It was the first time in the 23 years since we founded the organization that we had experienced such major upheaval.

This was a profoundly threatening and unsettling time for us personally and organizationally. After much thought, discussion and soul-searching, we decided to continue, recommit and stabilize the organization. Our goal in this crisis was simply to survive. We knew we did not want to let something that had come from the outside determine the manner of ending for us as an organization. If we were to end, we wanted to form the ending ourselves.

We were in contact with Stanley in person, by phone and by email throughout this period. As always, he was immediate, pragmatic, generous, wise and constantly urging and reminding us to form the situation, rather than be formed by it. It was our first experience of Stanley facilitating group and organizational change. This was a significant moment, for it deepened our understanding of the many ways in which Formative principles could be applied.

The nature of the ending had been both explosive and protracted. Stanley made the point that breaking out is a way of ending and an attempt to re-organize. The impact of this ending had been to take us into an experience of chaos. In a very short period of time we had gone from experiencing and perceiving ourselves as a healthy, strong, alpha organization in which we saw ourselves and functioned as young, vital, successful, achieving, professionals to experiencing and perceiving ourselves as being in a massive, survival threatening event. It completely disorganized how we saw ourselves. Suddenly, the future was clearly unsure. We felt certain we would go on, but we didn't know how.

On his annual spring trip to Europe in 2000, Stanley came and worked with us in our staff group to help us find our way through the morass of anger, anxiety, hurt and defensiveness we were working in. We began to look at what was ending. One of the important outcomes of this meeting was that by understanding the process we were going through, we were able to move away from trying to find reasons, make the affair personal or apportion blame. We now viewed the situation as a transition rather than a crisis. This was empowering in freeing us from the empty circular questions of *why*, *what if* and *if only*. By ending our picture of one person leaving as creating a crisis, we developed a picture of greater mobility, flux and change, a picture of an organization at a particular phase in its life, making a transition to another phase in its life. We started to understand the ending of one form and shape in the staff and organization as the beginning of a new form and shape.

We came to realize that, as a core staff and as an organization, we were in transition. Most of us were in our fifties and sixties and hadn't really recognized until this event that we had been growing the organization and over-extending to conform to an outdated alpha value system. We realized at a personal level we could no longer sustain these alpha expectations we had of ourselves. We were at a different phase in our lives without registering or knowing it. Because of this disparity, the organization was in jeopardy unless we could re-organize its needs to be in alignment with our own. The work for us, then, was to become clear about who we were, what we wanted, what we could support and maintain. Our focus became less organizational, and we became more concerned with ourselves and our quality of life as a beginning of forming a view of ourselves and the organization from a *second adult* perspective. This was a relief. We didn't have to find all the answers for the future of the organization; we simply needed to work out where we were and what we wanted for the future as we engaged in it.

We saw how we had become much closer and more open with each other through dealing with this crisis, how we ended some outdated and inhibiting hierarchical boundaries as a group and learned to depend on one another, how we had developed a stronger sense of ownership, responsibility, strength and gravitas as a staff and how the situation had reinforced our ethical and professional boundaries. This was also a transitional journey for each person in which everyone redefined their relationships to themselves and to the group. As well as becoming clearer, we each became stronger. We began to see who we were, who we had been and, who we were becoming: A group and an organization moving into a *second adult* phase, much less driven. We could begin to plan and talk and think about where we might be going and organize ourselves to go there. As a result of this, a sense of optimism, possibility, goodwill, good health, resilience radiated out from the staff through the organization.

What we have seen since 1999 is that the tasks and responsibilities of the organization that we, as founder directors, felt ourselves to be carrying alone have become shared tasks and responsibilities. We have stepped back, others have stepped forward, there is more dialogue about decisions and policies, and there is more creativity in relation to individual and organizational work. The celebration of our 30th birthday this year is a manifestation of Stanley's presence and of the Formative work in the life of our group and organization.

Biography

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