



# Somatic Psychotherapy Today

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Special Supplement

Fall 2014

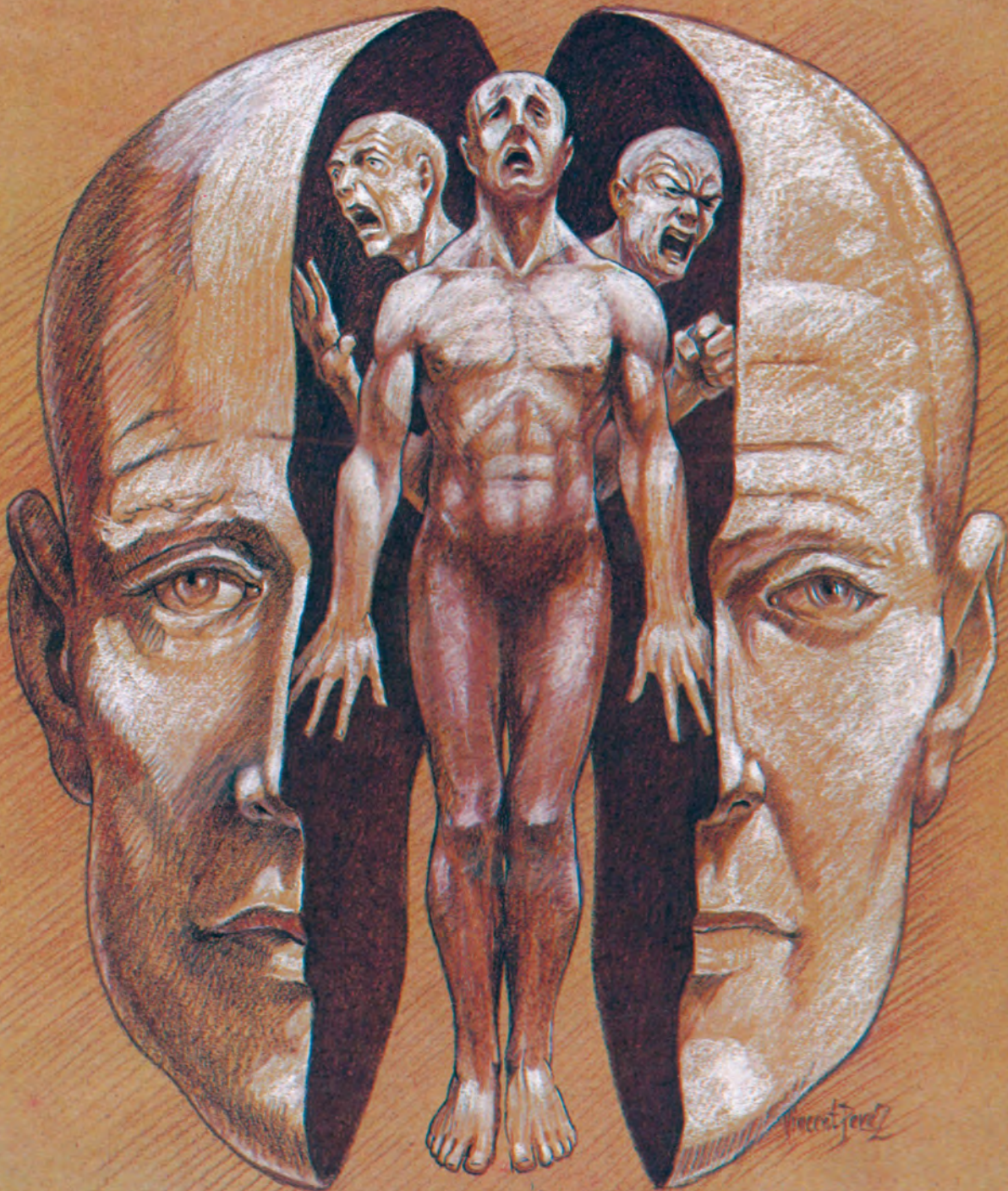
**Emotional  
Anatomy  
and  
Formative  
Psychology  
with  
Stanley  
Keleman**





# emotional anatomy

STANLEY KELEMAN







**Stanley Keleman** has been practicing and developing somatic therapy for over forty years and is a pioneer in his study of the body and its connection to the sexual, emotional, psychological, and imaginative aspects of human experience. Through his writings and practice, he has developed a methodology and conceptual framework for the life of the body. He has been the director of the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California since 1971, where he maintains a private and group practice, and an active schedule of national and international professional programs. He is the honorary president and director for research at the Zurich School for Form and Movement, the Centro de Psicologia Formativa do Brasil in Rio de Janeiro, and the Institute for Formative Psychology in Solingen, Germany, where he also teaches.

**He is the recipient of lifetime achievement awards** from the European Association for Body Psychotherapy and the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy. He received an honorary Ph.D. from Saybrook University for his contributions to the field of body psychotherapy and humanistic psychology. He is the author of numerous books including *Emotional Anatomy*, *Embodying Experience*, and *Your Body Speaks Its Mind*. Currently, he is writing a book on dreams and the body.

**It is our honor to publish this special supplement** letting our readers know about Stanley's new DVD and his continuing contributions to our field. We offer many heartfelt thanks to Stanley Keleman and Marilyn Haller for their contributions to this issue.

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# Somatic Psychotherapy Today

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## Editor's Letter



There's an energy that occurs when I start a new issue; the impulse to reach out and connect with people takes on a life of its own. I immerse myself in the subject matter, breathing in as if physically inhaling the content. I allow myself to be in the moment with whomever I'm interviewing or whatever paper I am editing. And while there, I explore what happens to me—the internalized sensations as well as the thoughts narrating a story of their own in my mind. I know I'm hooked when the momentum itself compels me, when the content grasps hold, a firm embrace. The result is consistently the same: I want to learn more. There is joy in learning and curiosity has been my lifetime counterpart, its magnetism pulls me toward the unknown. My response is to dive into research. Watching the DVD, *Emotional Anatomy*, reading articles about Formative Psychology, finding images to accompany the articles, all the incoming data stimulated my desire to attend Stanley's workshops and experience this miraculous healing process first hand.

Reading the reflections about Stanley Keleman, feeling the love and respect he has earned over the years, filled my heart with a longing to know him better. And I am grateful for the spirit of time we did share. Talking with Stanley, sensing his presence, knowing without thought that we were here together, our minds, bodies, souls touched in those moments. I wanted more. And for now, I am honored to have shared this journey vicariously through the lens of a few of his followers. I suspect, had I had time and space, a legion of colleagues would have appeared and gladly shared their Stanley Keleman stories.

Today, we invite you to experience Stanley Keleman yourself, first here in the pages of our special supplement, then in his new video, *Emotional Anatomy*, his numerous audio recordings, articles, and books. And perhaps, one day, in person.

As always, we invite and welcome your response. Each author provides his or her email. Writers thrive on reader response—it feels good to know we've connected through our text. So if the urge to reach out and connect wells within you, please send us a note. We will be sure to reply.

Warmly,  
Nancy Eichhorn, PhD  
[writetobe@myfairpoint.net](mailto:writetobe@myfairpoint.net)

## From Our Cover Designer



I was introduced to Stanley Keleman's work at Naropa University, in Boulder, Colorado, and found it an invaluable resource in my studies. It is a pleasure to be able to add my piece for this special supplement, and I hope you all enjoy the issue.

Sincerely,  
Diana Houghton Whiting, M.A., LPC (Cand.)





# Emotional Anatomy in 3D

## An Interview with Stanley Keleman

By Nancy Eichhorn, PhD

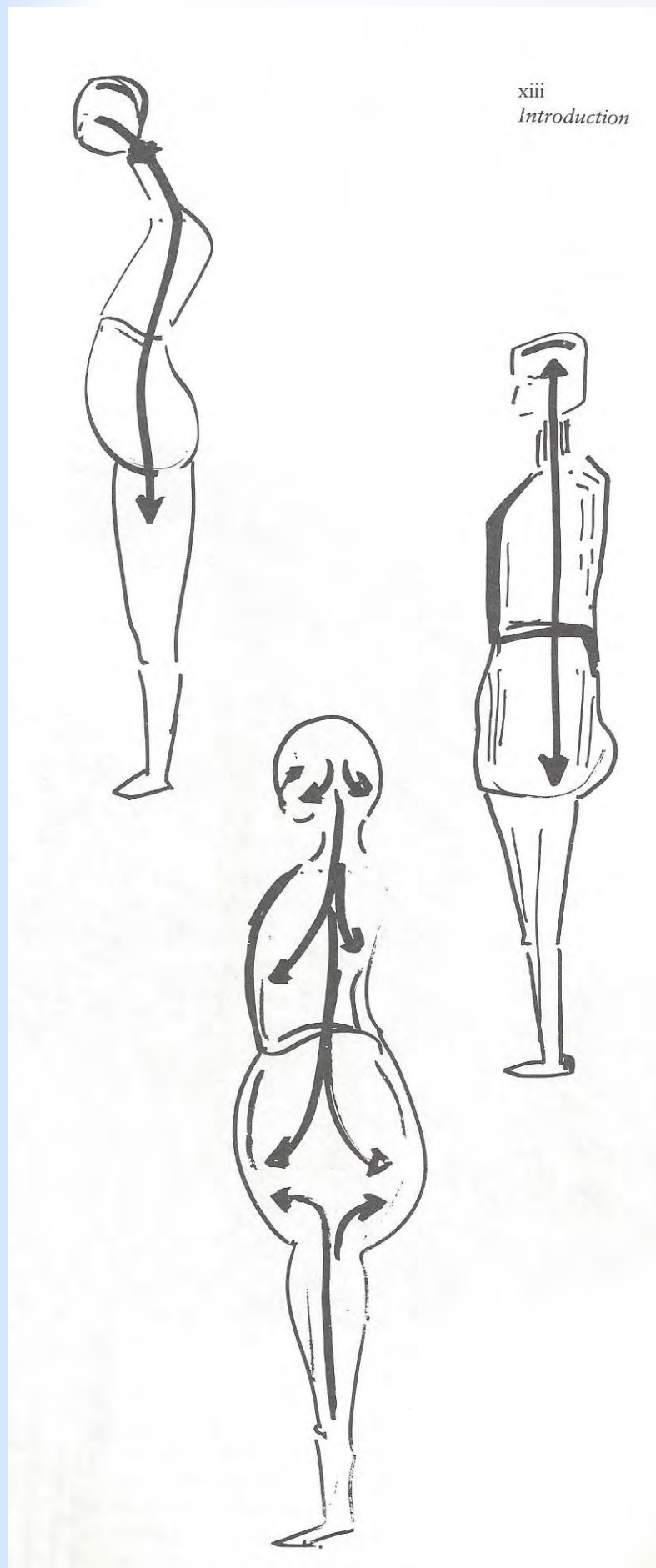
Stanley Keleman's ability to be in relationship with me, to pulsate in and out, to respond to my overwhelm by slowing down to allow me time to catch up resulted in an enlightening interview. It transformed the experience from a space of frustration as his monologue, as our dialog outdistanced my hand as I scribbled words on a notepad, to a platform of fun as I explored my own thought patterns while simultaneously summarizing his statements 'to get it'—to feel as if I were understanding what he had to say and why it was important, and 'to get him'—to feel into him and understand his presence in my life in this moment. There's a story here, for me as well as for our readers, about Stanley Keleman and his new DVD entitled, *Emotional Anatomy*.

## Emotional Anatomy: The Structure of Experience

Stanley wrote his landmark text, *Emotional Anatomy: The Structure of Experience*, to map the geometry of somatic experience in 1985. As founder and director of the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California (1971-today), Stanley developed his therapeutic and educational approach, trademarked as Formative Psychology, based on his methodology and conceptual framework for the life of the body. He has spent the past 50 plus years creating, teaching, researching, writing, presenting. He shared that it was time to bring his seminal text to life in a virtual way.

“I came to a point 10 years ago where I thought I needed to update my book, *Emotional Anatomy*. When I was assembling the images for the DVD, my wife died and that delayed everything. It was a big challenge to overcome,” Stanley said. He shared his truth with such a gentle tone that in response I felt nudged into a quiet space, a moment of reflection. His life partner passed, and he used his way of being in this life to embody the experience and move forward. There’s a sense, an embodied sensation that occurs when you meet a master teacher/practitioner. A small ripple started in that instant and grew as our time together continued.

“I assembled the DVD the same way I had done for the book. The images came first and the text followed. The images tell the Formative story. For the book I sat down at this big table in the meeting room with the images all around me, with big rolls of butcher paper, and I wrote the text. I wrote what I was thinking about the pictures I had already drawn. I wanted to write a Formative book and what an experience that was! For the DVD, I wanted moving images to convey the sense of the body’s internal dynamic



not as a mechanical event but as an animate forming that generates feeling and meaning.”

The audience that buys the book and the DVD often attend Stanley’s workshops. He said that most people would assume his students were 100% body workers but actually that’s not the case. A substantial group of his students are artists, painters, and dancers, and then there is another entire contingent who are interested in philosophy and cognitive understandings.

“People have an idea of the body and they seek to improve it, care for it through diet, exercise, good relationships and fulfilling work but they do not always think of the body as the source of our psychology, of our thinking, feeling, and the orientation of our values,” Stanley said. “The bodied life is bigger than health or exercise, it’s how we are alive and how we manage that life, how we form our values and make meaningful choices. The body is the source and an orientation for what an embodied life is like. Philosopher, dancer, painter, psychologist, body worker, it’s all about how voluntary acts can influence their life and their way of experiencing themselves and the world.”

Stanley’s intention when creating the DVD was to make the images in the original text more experientially available. “I wanted people to have the experience of the images being more than an objective idea because they are, in fact, conveying real anatomical experiences. He decided to follow the principle he followed when writing *Emotional Anatomy*—let the images tell the story.

“Someone could sit down and go through the book, image by image and understand the concepts,”

Stanley said. “The DVD images convey all the information you need to know.”

The DVD has six chapters: Creation: the Body Plan; The Pulsatory Accordion of Body Shapes; The Stress Continuum; The Inflating and Deflating Emotions; The Continuity of Emotional Expressions; the Emergence of Voluntary Self-Influence; and Voluntary Muscular Self-Regulation. There is also a 12-minute segment with Stanley discussing the DVD’s content. His intent during the audio-only portion is an introduction to set the tone for what viewers would see. I found the information he provided in those 12 minutes guided my viewing, provided the framework I needed to follow through the artistry and musical flow of the imagery. Rereading Stanley’s book further supported my viewing (for in-depth reviews of the DVD, please see the companion articles in this supplement).

“I had a lot of fun making the DVD,” Stanley said, his passion and enthusiasm for the project apparent in his tone of voice and the punctuation at the end of his sentence. “I had to find a way to make the images move to convey anatomical structural complexity and at the same time stay within my budget. I was educating myself and entering into a formative endeavor. I understood the creative process. Ten years of heavy-duty metal sculpting helped me understand what it means to put your hand to something and give it form.”

“The images for the book and the DVD were created in my somatic imagination, they arose in my dreams, on my walks, reading books, seeing movies and videos, and certainly from working and interacting with people. I was constantly reaching around for a

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piece of paper, for anything I could find to scribble my ideas. Some of the images in the DVD are taken from the book and given dimension, and movement, and interaction with other images. Others are taken from videos prepared for teaching seminars and adapted by layering images to represent everyday behavioral functions.”

The DVD is a vision, a philosophy, and a methodology. Stanley braided concepts from *Emotional Anatomy* with the principles of Formative Psychology and its methodology. When teachers show this DVD to students, when therapists sit down to watch, timing is everything. “I don’t think people’s attention span is more than 30 to 32 minutes and then you need a break. Visually, I broke the DVD into 32-minute segments so you can watch one part at a time. When I show it in class or teach from it during a workshop, I first show it with no words, no talking. I simply offer

looking at it and taking it in at whatever level is possible for each person. Then when it is done I ask, ‘Tell me what you experience.’”

In the DVD, Stanley uses the image of the jellyfish as the primordial statement of every human expression—pulsation. Pulsation is the basis of all animate life. It is cellular metabolism, the heart beating, respiration, neural excitation, and it is in the behaviors we recognize as thinking, feeling, acting. Swelling, and shrinking, extending and gathering can, to a degree, be managed by voluntary effort, Stanley said. We are creating a state of personalized embodiment as we move from being an inherited body to forming our own personal body. Voluntary self-influence is the body’s way of personalizing the impersonal.

“Living is a pulsatory event. Any behavior has cycles of activity and cycles of less activity, times for extending and times for gathering

back,” Stanley said. “Every muscular act, every loving act, every cognitive act. Any interaction, from mom-to-child to woman-to-man, the activity is there and subject to lesser or greater amounts of voluntary differentiated influence.”

“Nina Bull was my first mentor,” Stanley continued. “She taught me that Freud’s unconscious is a body behavior. The body is a library of action patterns that are below the threshold of our field of awareness. When I work with people, they learn to experience their own style of reaching out and gathering back, how their motor behaviors generate feeling and meaning. They enter the experiential field and are then able to differentiate their acts.

Stanley highlighted the pulsatory function during our interview. “It is how we extend ourselves for contact and move forward and gather back: How we pause and manage ourselves so we are not

**His intention when writing *Emotional Anatomy* and then again when creating the DVD was to illustrate how the body changes and voluntarily forms itself.**

too fast or too intense. How I change and how I behave with you is how we make a pulsatory back and forth to form a connection and a contactful dialogue.”

“For me, the unconscious,” he said, “is the body’s basic pulsatory rhythms of its own excitatory processes. The body organizes motor/emotional maps of actions in the cortex. Pulsatory excitation becomes motor maps that set the action patterns of the body. These action patterns form a library of differentiated acts in the cortex then down the line to associated muscular behavior patterns. The brain is action oriented. A feeling or thought is about an act or the inhibition of an act. It is not about-controlling the body, rather the cortex differentiates inherited behaviors. Inherited patterns need to be aroused so they can be differentiated, however sooner or later we all learn that immediate expression of an inherited instinctual behavior may not be in our best interest. People often do not know how to change their behavior or feeling. Understanding experientially how to organize a behavior, that there are a sequence of steps between the beginning and the completion of an act, is about learning to increase and decrease the muscular intensity of an action. To ‘do it more and do it less’ is voluntary self-influence. Self forming is the voluntary influence of inherited patterns of action.”

According to Stanley, life is a formative process. And at the heart of

the human organism is this formative process, and the body’s concern is maintaining itself, this animate structure we experience as ‘me’.

“The body first follows an involuntary inherited genetic program; however, the body also has the ability to voluntarily differentiate inherited acts that then become synaptic organizations and muscle cortical behaviors that are not pre-determined. Voluntarily influencing the body nature and the memories we make in the process of doing this become our personal body and our personal life. From conception on the body’s intent is to form itself. As adults we can use the body’s formative process through voluntary effort to form new shapes, new memories, feelings and relationships,” he said.

His intention when writing *Emotional Anatomy* and then again when creating the DVD was to illustrate how the body changes and voluntarily forms itself. Both efforts take destiny out of the realm of mysticism and magic.

“The main interest of the organism is not sexuality, nor relationships. It is interested in maintaining its animate form over a long period of time that allows for personalized sexuality and relationships. The driving force for animate life is to extend the life process, and to do so, structure is essential. For structure to maintain animate life, it must remember its motoric experiences so they can be

repeated. The body organizes itself with excitatory tension and muscular pressure. This tension/pressure can expand and contract. It can maintain an inside and outside surface. It is elastic, permeable—it lets some things through, not others. When it is full, it says so; when it wants more, it says so. The body is able to contract and expand according to its needs and its pulsatory patterns.”

“The Formative method teaches how to use motor acts to change body shape, which changes experience. How the body is aroused and contains that arousal, how the body forms behavior is primarily the body speaking with itself in nonverbal language. As acts become more and more differentiated and voluntary, people learn to give words and personal expression to their experience. For me the psychology of the body can only arise from the experiences of the body itself. My dictum is: Form yourself or be formed by others.”

As our time came to a close, Stanley shared that creating the DVD was an act of love. “It was one hell of a lot of fun,” he said. “I’m swimming in learning things about myself that is just delightful.”



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Publications & Recordings  
by Stanley Keleman





# Meeting Stanley Keleman and his Emotional Anatomy

Leila Cohn, MA

**It is especially meaningful for me** to write about Stanley Keleman and the *Emotional Anatomy* DVD, for *Emotional Anatomy*, the book, was the pivot of a turning point in my life. My first contact with Stanley's work happened upon my reading *Emotional Anatomy* in 1986. The book caused a profound impact on me, for I was deeply impressed by its theoretical soundness, as well as by its innovative language. The vision of the human being as *an embodied subjective process, self-organizing and continually evolving* captivated me immediately. I decided to learn that work; two years later I left Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, where I've stayed for six years working with Stanley. This was a life transforming experience, both personally and professionally. Stanley's powerful, generous, and deeply human presence has informed my learning process throughout time, and our relationship has been part and parcel of my formative endeavor all along.

**In 1993** I began to talk with Stanley about his visiting Brazil and about the development of Formative Psychology here. After my return, I founded the Brazilian Center of Formative Psychology in Rio de Janeiro, in 1995, where I've been developing formative work through classes and workshops, and Stanley has visited us several times in the past coordinating workshops for our groups. We have also established a Formative Psychology Professional Program, from which came the six people who now compose our professional team here. This twenty-six-year partnership with Stanley has enriched my life and given me much support in developing my work. However, most important of all, we have formed a solid and human friendship, which I value immensely and which has become for me a living reference of what it means to have a formative relationship.

**I've gone back and forth** from Berkeley to Rio many times since 1994, and Stanley has also helped me form an inclusive two-world reality in which I've lived with comfort and joy. In 2007, Stanley mentioned he was interested in forming small groups for deepening studies in Formative Psychology. He said these groups were to be intimate and personal, "the way I believe in teaching and learning these days." Since 2009, I've been in a regular group that gets together with Stanley for a few days and has conversations about formative psychology. This has been an invaluable forming experience, as well as an educational model to be reproduced in the future. Among other things, the friendly and intimate ambiance of these meetings gave birth to the Interview Project with Stanley in 2012 and 2013. A cooperative partnership between the Center for Energetic Studies and the

Brazilian Center of Formative Psychology made it possible for us to make a series of interviews, which have originated seven video clips with Stanley, currently available on You Tube. What I present here is then embedded in 26 years of formative work, which has become also a way of living and thinking my life.

**What spoke so strongly** to my heart that made me stay in California for six years and choose Formative Psychology as a life path?

**A few things impacted me deeply:**

- The concept of the human being as an *embodied formative process*, continually forming itself.
- The existence of a *somatic language (and concepts)* to talk about the bodily processes.

- The concept of a pulsatory **Emotional Anatomy**—anatomy and emotional reality being *one inseparable phenomenon*.
- The concept of **Personal Evolution** based upon *somatic and neural plasticity* and on *voluntary muscular -cortical self-influence*.
- The existence of a well-structured, sound working methodology—the **Five Steps of the Formative Practice**—that provided me with the necessary tools for working with myself and others.

*“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 source of human subjectivity” (Cohn, 2007, pp 21).*

According to Keleman, all human experiences are embodied and grounded on anatomical organization. Anatomy is a pulsating, multidimensional, and plastic reality, and the architecture of our internal spaces involves a dynamic relationship between pulsating tissues, organized in different degrees of tonus, pressure and speed, and generating emotional and cognitive experiences (Keleman, 2012). The Emotional Anatomy DVD beautifully depicts the concept of a pulsating anatomy, evoking in viewers the experience of our own living pulse. Personally, after years of formative work, I take this DVD as a gift, bringing alive in moving images much of what I had experienced and much of what I had imagined in reading the book. The whole thing came alive and this felt like receiving a gift!

**The images of people** creating gradations in the muscle-emotional

intensity of postures, gestures, and attitudes affirm the Formative postulate that *voluntary modulation of the motor act is an asset to human life*. The images show how the use of muscular-cortical effort makes it possible to alter the intensity of emotional states, facilitating the creation of new behaviors—voluntarily unfolded from an involuntary act. It also makes clear that behavior is an anatomical shape in motion generating subjective experiences, that anatomical organization equals action patterns, which equals behavior and experience. Watching the DVD we actually see ourselves as malleable organisms, part of a biological matrix, endowed with somatic and neural plasticity as well as with voluntary capacity, able to change shape and to influence ourselves through voluntary motor-cortical acts. This is powerful to see. The cooperative nature of our body-brain-hand relationship and their pulsatory reality appears in beautiful superimposed images, revealing the dynamics of human plasticity and personal evolution. The DVD also clearly shows how we shape ourselves by the way we use ourselves in situations, offering an alternative to the diagnostic models commonly present in the psychological culture.

**Keleman’s somatic-emotional methodology** (1987, 2014) is based on neuro-anatomical and physiological principles, and on the properties of plasticity and variability in the body and brain. We’ve learned that the actions of the body are mapped through synaptic connections, and that the repetition of an act strengthens these synapses, consolidating brain maps and stabilizing behavior (Edelman, 2000, pp 54-63). This is how we learn, and how we form habits in response to challenging situations. The formative practice uses voluntary micro movements to activate muscular-cortical connections and modulate the

intensity of a muscular act, creating a variety of action patterns. Using voluntary effort to create a variety of intensities in an emotional attitude creates new synapses and neural circuits. This implies a reorganization of brain maps and neuromuscular connections, which now comprise a larger network of circuits, and an increase in the repertoire of behaviors and emotional experiences. The Emotional Anatomy DVD pictures the interconnectedness of body-brain-hand-inside-outside-macro-micro human processes, and the emergence of voluntary **personal self-regulation**. It pictures how the practice with micro movements creates a diversity of actions and experiences, forming new ways of being present. This allows people to choose how to act in different situations, and contributes in a powerful way to end the experience of helplessness and victimization in relation to one’s habitual behavioral-emotional patterns. This can make an enormous difference in a person’s life and to me, is one of the most important contributions of Stanley’s work! The DVD shows how voluntary self-regulation can empower people as formative agents of their own life. It means that people have the freedom to choose how they wish to be in the world, that they are able to participate in their own evolution and thus influence their future. This represents an enormous asset to human existence.

**Voluntarily differentiated actions**, internal experiences and personal narratives form the tripod of human subjectivity. Stanley Keleman has presented us with the possibility of personally influencing all three of them, and to form a more satisfying life. This is a promise of freedom and hope, and a gift to the entire human community, to which I am deeply grateful.

**Leila Cohn** – Licensed Psychologist, **CRP 05/8164**, MA East-West Psychology, CIIS, SF – CA, has worked

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# Learning to Manage Performance Anxiety: A Formative Approach

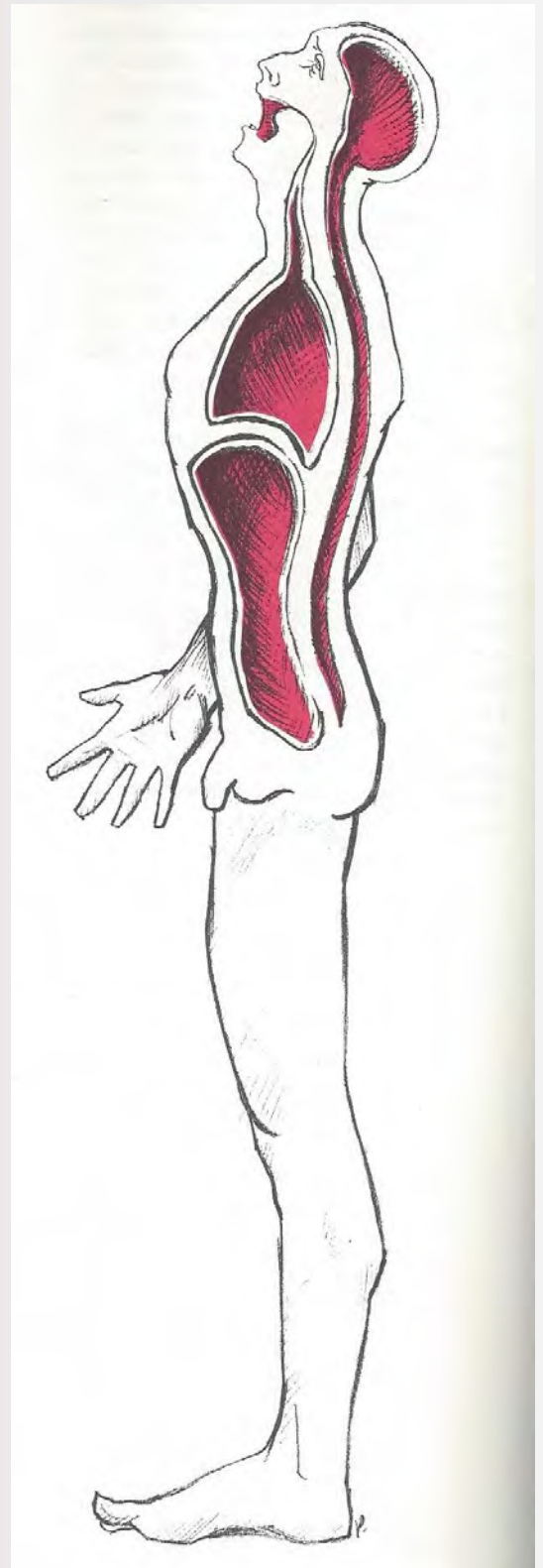
By Andrew Gootnick, PhD

**About 10 years ago**, as I entered my mid-50's, I decided to take mandolin and voice lessons. Learning to play a new instrument is a formative challenge (mandolin is tuned like a violin, not like a guitar). I experienced stress when practicing at home and had even more performance anxiety at jam sessions with other players. My fight-flight-freeze reactions took over, especially when it was my turn to play an instrumental solo. I strongly resembled the "Bracing-Spasticity" guy on Stanley's "Continuum of Startle and Stress" chart (see *Emotional Anatomy*, 1985: pp. 61-102 and the 2014 animated DVD). My body stiffened; my throat contracted; the muscles in my hands and fingers became spastic; my heart raced; my anxiety and adrenalin levels spiked; my breathing was shallow; my brain became de-corticalised and foggy. All of these emergency reactions significantly interfered with my ability to play my instrument, sing, breathe properly, remember the lyrics, stay focused, "keep time", and sustain a pulsatory connection with myself and the other musicians.

**I suffered through** several months of jam session misery and got very discouraged about my playing. Stanley reminded me that I had considerable clinical experience dealing with these stress patterns and their muscular, physiological, emotional and cognitive aspects. For many years I had been using Formative Psychology methods to help psychotherapy clients deal with PTSD. I had also taught many training seminars on this topic. I began to see that I could use my clinical experience to influence my own anxieties about musical performance.

**I asked myself:** "Why not use VME to influence my stress reactions while I'm singing and playing mandolin? I can use the 5 Steps to recognize the form of my performance anxiety, intensify and de-intensify that form in slow measured steps, wait and then make a decision about how I want to re-shape myself to play and sing." I began using VME when practicing at home and playing at jam sessions. I used the 5 Steps to re-organize my anticipatory reactions to playing something difficult. I wanted to pro-actively influence my performance anxiety, rather than passively suffer and only hope I could get through. Using VME over time, I learned to reduce the intensity, frequency and duration of my startle-stress patterns and

*Continued on page 33*





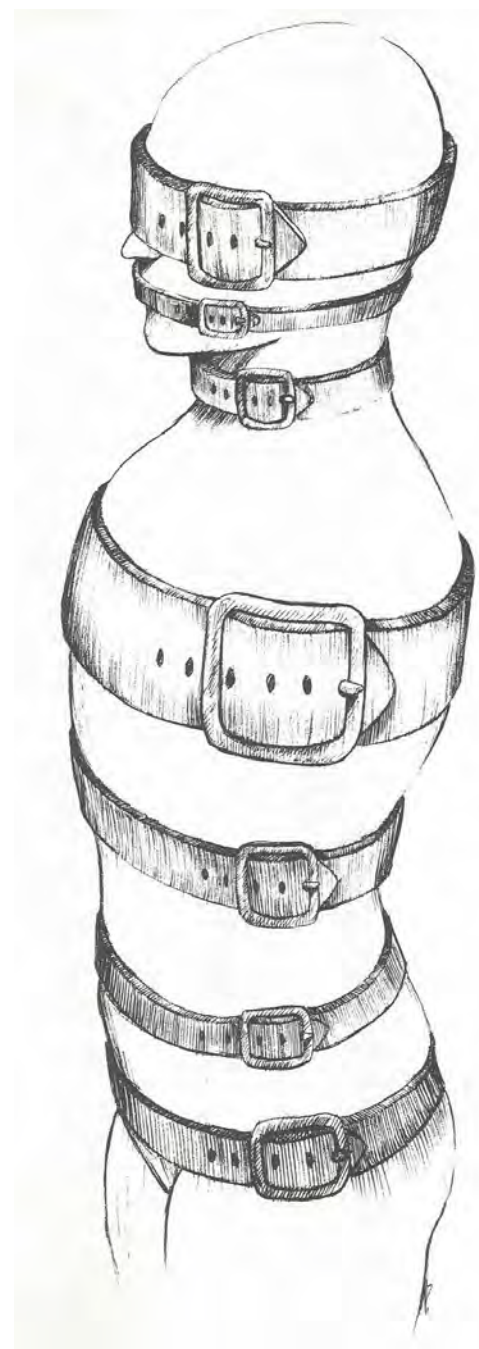
## Review of Stanley Keleman's Emotional Anatomy [DVD]

**Dr. Gerhard Zimmermann, MD**  
Mainz, Germany

**Stanley Keleman's** new *Emotional Anatomy* DVD presents an updated and animated version of his book *Emotional Anatomy*, which was originally published in 1985. The pictures in the book were, for the time already, outstanding, showing how the inner space of human organisms was layered and how expansion and contraction formed the basis of self-regulation, emotionality and experience.

**The DVD** goes far beyond the book, not only showing impressive animations of, for example stress patterns, but also including more recent principles of Formative Psychology.

**The DVD covers** the following topics: emotional anatomy; creation (the body plan); the pulsatory accordion of body shapes; the stress continuum; the inflating and deflating emotions and the continuity of emotional expressions; the emergence of voluntary self-influence and voluntary muscular self-regulation. Human anatomy and the creation of life follows a body plan starting with cell divisions – in the early stages called gastrulation – which form tubes and layers and later on pouches and diaphragms. The forming body pulsates horizontally, vertically, and rotationally. The tissue pulsation changes anatomy and organizes human expressions and behavior by expansion and contraction. In this sense, "The body forms itself in anticipation of the aim it serves. It assumes a shape: a shape for doing work, for fighting, for feeling, as well as a shape for loving." (Viktor E. von Gebattel cited in J. Lyons, J. Ecology of The Body, 1987). Stanley Keleman understands anatomy literally as behavior and therefore as destiny. Cardiac-neural pulsations are basic for a personalized embodied self and its adult existence. The pulsations of the organism can be described as a pulsatory accordion that demonstrates how morphology and behavior are reflected in the overbound (rigid and dense) and underbound (motile and porous) structures. "In





resisting the organism becomes more solid; it stiffens or braces. In creating more form, structure, boundaries, and solidity the organism becomes overbound. In giving in the organism softens, yields, becomes more liquid-like. In creating less form, structure, boundaries and a more liquid-like state the organism becomes underbound” (Keleman, 1985, p. 76).

**The startle reflex** is an attention-alarm behavior pattern on a continuum of investigation, assertion, annoyance, anger, avoidance, submission and collapse. It is part of the stress response. Keleman writes in his book: “If the first response alleviates the insult, the event that interrupts us, the organism returns to homeostasis. If not, the first response can invoke the second, the second lead to the third, and so on. In cases of severe threat, the early stages of startle are by-passed and we jump immediately to a more extreme response” (Keleman, 1985, p. 64). In the video, Keleman shows how the organism changes its shape from fight/flight to aversion and defeat and from investigation to helplessness and defeat.

**The inflating emotions**—assertion, pride, anger, fear, contempt or dislike—are related to an overbound anatomical shape. The deflating emotions—retreat, submission, defeat, despair, grief and helplessness—are accompanied by an underbound anatomical shape. Both form the continuity of emotional expression from intimidation to anger to rage and from shame to humiliation. “The expression of feeling requires more than reorganizing expansion and contraction, or softening patterns of fear and anger, utilizing muscle softening techniques. Rather a dialogue must be established among all the levels of pulsation and their emotional expressions. Muscular social patterns of coordination and speaking must be established. New emotional expressions have to be organized” (Keleman, 1985, p. 102).

To initiate the above mentioned dialogue Keleman uses Voluntary Muscular Effort (VME). In this process the cortex and the body are engaging each other. The aim of VME is to regulate organismic pressure and to differentiate the relationship of the organism to itself and the environment.

**As an example,** Keleman shows how using VME with the hand is influencing the body and its brain. Using VME one can make a muscular model of a behavior pattern. Assembling and disassembling the pattern creates layers within the pattern. “The human being using voluntary muscular cortical effort is a formative agent of self-change who creates interiority and transmits it to others.” (Keleman, 2014). Voluntarily repeating a shape is re-entering a pattern, which forms interiority and intimacy. This is also shown in two tango dancers and in a group of parachute jumpers.



“With voluntary influence one can answer the question: How do I want to organize my future? Voluntary effort is a method that transcends imagination and thinking to alter one’s anatomy and behavior” (Keleman, 2014).

**The video** has not only an educational purpose; it is also a statement of body philosophy. It contains many elements of art, for instance overlaying pictures and the accompanying music by James Matthew Thomas creates

*Continued on page 21*



# A Personal Reflection

By Sonja H. Sutherland, MA, GCFP

**Stanley Keleman's** Formative Psychology® — his videos, somatic practices, and poetic writings—resonate deeply through the layers of my being, awakening my relationship to my own ongoing inner pulsations and rhythms, and empowering me to participate in and to influence the forming of my internal landscape and the fundamental shaping of how I am who I am.

**Through images of pulsing cells** and tissues from our anatomical reality superimposed upon images of the ebb and flow of the ocean's tides shown in his new video, *Emotional Anatomy*, I experience how I am a part of all of life's pulsatory process with a sense of belonging. I recognize myself as a dynamic, living, pulsing organism with interconnected and interacting ongoing relationships throughout myself, pulsing within myself, with others, as well as along with all animate life. I not only recognize my anatomy as experience, but as behavior I can influence.

**Keleman's formative approach** empowers me to influence the shape and intensity of my bodily attitudes and emotions. As a Feldenkrais practitioner® with a background in aikido and dance, I have spent many years learning how to move with greater ease and efficiency; yet, my training did not directly address how to influence my underlying bodily attitudes or emotions. Through my

years of somatic practice and studies in Formative Psychology®, I recognize how integral the motoric behavior patterns of my emotions and attitudes are in every move I make. For example, as I prepare to engage in an activity with great determination, how I physically shape and maintain this attitude becomes a fundamental part of my movement pattern. As a very determined person, if I disassemble this bodily attitude a little, I become less rigid in my narrow, goal oriented, all or nothing approach, and I organize persistence instead of insistence. I become more receptive, widen my horizon, and become more open to feedback from others while still engaging in the process of forming toward my goal. This not only affects how efficiently I move, it influences how I feel, think, act, and interact. If I engage myself formatively and differentiate my bodily attitude in discreet steps, I create greater and lesser degrees of determination. This allows me to recognize and influence how determined I am being, need to be, and wish to be at different times in various situations. This fundamentally changes how I move through my life.

**Through formative practices**, I develop the ability to somatically influence the shape and intensity of my desires, hopes, fears, griefs, and joys. I can manage, contain, and

participate more fully in my emotional life.

**Keleman's** Formative Psychology® gives me hope and teaches me how to generate hope. I do not mean wishful thinking or positive affirmations. I grew up on high hopes based on lofty ideas and distant dreams. I am referring to hope that is based on the somatic behavior that is present for me right now that I can use as a resource for forming my next step into my future. Step-by-step, no matter how small, I can orient toward creating a future that is grounded in my current behavioral patterns out of which I can differentiate and form related but new behaviors. Little-by-little, small, discreet anatomical behavioral changes open the door to new sustainable possibilities I can form into my future.

**As a somatic educator**, I crave the combination of experientially-based emotional understanding of human anatomy steeped in science. The Formative framework satisfies this hunger. Formative Psychology® is grounded in evolutionary principles and based upon the biological understanding of how animate life grows, forms, and develops. Keleman has developed a palpable, experientially practiced, and anatomically supported understanding of how human's behave and function.

*Continued on page 17*



# The Pleasure of Knowing Stanley Keleman

Clifford Goldenberg, MS, MFT

I have had the privilege and the pleasure of knowing Stanley Keleman nearly forty years, almost my entire adult life. In that time, he has played many roles in the formation of my Adult: therapist, mentor, colleague, teacher, friend, and collaborator. Over the years I have come to appreciate many aspects of Stanley. Foremost in my mind is that he is an artist and not just in the sense that he has been both a sculptor and a poet. He is a visionary, relentlessly dedicated to deepening his vision and orienting interested others to what he has grasped, held and refined. Because his understanding is based on a pulsating, alive process, it is never static. That is why, in forty years of learning from Stanley, he is never simply repeating himself, but always showing us a new facet of an open-ended system. The DVD, which he meticulously crafted over fifteen years' time, means to animate an animate understanding. Anatomy is alive. If we want to comprehend it, we have to resist the urge to make an abstract understanding. For me, Stanley's vision is an optimistic one: It rejects reductionism and offers always the possibility of self-influence as the well-spring of personal freedom.

**Clifford Goldenberg, MS, MFT** is a Formative therapist in private practice at The Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, CA. He is the videographer of many videos about Formative Psychology in collaboration with Stanley Keleman. He can be reached at: [cjgoldenberg@gmail.com](mailto:cjgoldenberg@gmail.com).

*Sutherland continued from page 16*

**Through partaking in** Keleman's workshops, viewing his experientially oriented videos, and attending his formative practice classes, I grow and develop a deep, experiential understanding of myself and my nonverbal body language that Keleman frames with his poetic, descriptive language of the soma's formative process. As I read his books, the words come to life in me. I connect with his writing viscerally, muscularly, and intellectually. And I form a web of neuromuscular, visceral, cognitive connections within myself. This helps me to form a

richer, more integrated, layered, and multidimensional inner life that I can enjoy and share with others.

**Sonja H. Sutherland, MA, GCFP**, is an experienced Feldenkrais practitioner® with 14 years of ongoing studies in Formative Psychology®. She holds a black belt in Aikido and a Masters in Dance. Sonja maintains a private practice in Berkeley, offering individual hands-on sessions for children, adults, and seniors. She leads somatic workshops and retreats in the US and Europe. For over 15 years, Sonja has developed and taught Creative Learning through Movement (CLTM) — a somatic, social emotional approach to working with elementary school children. For more info please visit: [www.LearningInAction.org](http://www.LearningInAction.org)





## Stanley Keleman: Over the Years

By Jacqueline Carleton, PhD

**I met Stanley Keleman** after perusing his incredible books and articles for many years, in the process of doing a volume of the *USABP Journal* dedicated to him (volume 6, #1, 2007). His students had already begun preparing a *festschrift* for his 75th birthday, so we had some unusually articulate "raw material" with which to work. I have to say that his followers, at various stages of work with him, were the easiest, most intelligent, and intuitive group I ever worked with in all my years of editing the *USABP Journal* and the *International Body Psychotherapy Journal*. This to me says something important about Stanley, about the quality of not only his contribution to our field but of his style of leadership.

**In the process of putting together** the volume dedicated to him, I was personally invited to a workshop he gave in Toronto to experience his work first hand. Over the years, as we have communicated about reprints of his special tribute (which was far and away our bestselling issue), met at various conferences, etc., I have been able to experience what I imagine his close students feel—how unfailingly inclusive, helpful, and generous he is with his creative output. He once explained to me that all his theoretical and other prose writing begins as poetry or sculpture. In terms of what we have learned about the nervous system in the last few years, it is evident that Stanley has long been conscious of the way that creative process unfolds.

**Much of his work** in both poetic and prose forms (which is for Stanley usually poetry written in paragraphs) now focuses on what he refers to as "late life" as a stage in human growth and evolution. I have found it particularly inspiring and see Stanley as leading me along a path that often feels otherwise a little treacherous. He has made so many aspects of what can seem scary about aging as just a slightly different way of accomplishing what the body always managed, perhaps just a little more slowly.

**Jacqueline A. Carleton, PhD**, holds an A.B. from Smith College, after which she did graduate work and research at MIT. Her PhD was earned at Columbia University. Dr. Carleton has had a private practice in Manhattan since the 1970's and has taught both body psychotherapy and psychoanalysis for more than 35 years. She is presently on the Executive Committee of the Integrative Trauma Treatment Program at the National Institute for the Psychotherapies (NIP) and founding editor of the *US Association for Body Psychotherapy Journal* and, more recently of the *International Body Psychotherapy Journal: The Art and Science of Somatic Praxis*. [www.jacquelineacarletonphd.com](http://www.jacquelineacarletonphd.com)



## Stanley Keleman: Personal Evolution

Published on Jun 18, 2013

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1FnYAwjXUM>

# INTERNATIONAL BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY JOURNAL

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF SOMATIC PRAXIS  
INCORPORATING US ASSOCIATION FOR BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY JOURNAL



**“Forming an Embodied Life: The Difference between Being Bodied and Forming an Embodied Life”**, by Stanley Keleman, published in the *International Body Psychotherapy Today*, volume 11, number 1, Spring 2012. Available online [http://www.ibpj.org/issues/articles/12400\\_St Stanley\\_Keleman.pdf](http://www.ibpj.org/issues/articles/12400_St Stanley_Keleman.pdf)

## Abstract reprinted with IBPJ Permission:

The human's ability to make transitions in its age shapes, socially and personally, produces distress, anxiety, and doubt about how to behave. One response is to become overly reliant on inherited responses. An alternative response is to use voluntary muscular influence and the formative dynamic to manage and resolve cortical emotional organismic dilemmas. The body is an organized environment, a structure of excitatory vitality and experiential knowledge, and a source of the personal and collective wisdom of knowing. Voluntary muscular effort extends this power, making it possible to participate in how we give body to experience and make memories.

Abstracts of this article are to be found on the [IBPJ website](#) in the following languages: Albanian, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish.

## Somatic Perspectives on Psychotherapy

### Stanley Keleman: Formative Psychology & Dreams

Stanley Keleman is the founder of *Formative Psychology*, an approach that views life as an organizing and formative process. He is based in Berkeley, CA, where he directs the Center for Energetic Studies.

The [Spring 2007](#) issue of *The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal* (now the *International Body Psychotherapy Journal*) was devoted to Stanley Keleman's work and its practical applications in psychotherapy, medicine, neurobiology, acupuncture, organizational development, literature, poetry, and personal growth. It includes an article by Stanley Keleman about *Dreams & the Body*. June 2009. See also [March 2008 conversation](#) and [Printable PDF transcript](#)

Podcast: [Download](#) (7.1MB)



# Formative Psychology™

and

## Somatic Education

© By Stanley Keleman

According to [www.centerpress.com](http://www.centerpress.com)'s website, Stanley Keleman discussed the embodied life with Eleanor Criswell, core faculty member of Meridian University on December 8, 2012. Their conversation was a part of the university's second annual Mystery of Embodiment summit. Keleman elaborates on that interview and the principles of Formative Psychology.

You may listen to the interview and/or read an edited elaboration of the interview.

[Audio in mp3](http://www.centerpress.com/interviews/interview_criswell_12_08_12.mp3) ([http://www.centerpress.com/interviews/interview\\_criswell\\_12\\_08\\_12.mp3](http://www.centerpress.com/interviews/interview_criswell_12_08_12.mp3))

[Text](http://www.centerpress.com/interviews/interview-criswell_12_08_12.html) ([http://www.centerpress.com/interviews/interview-criswell\\_12\\_08\\_12.html](http://www.centerpress.com/interviews/interview-criswell_12_08_12.html))

Centerpress.com also offers recordings of Keleman's interview with Shrink Rap Radio host David Van Nuys on August 10th, 2012 about "Creating an Embodied Life." You can listen to the entire conversation, or in sections, on Keleman's website: <http://www.centerpress.com/interviews.html>

[Creating an Embodied Life \(full interview\)](#)

[Part 1: A Rich and Fascinating Background](#)

[Part 2: Embodying: The Body You Shape](#)

[Part 3: Forming Thinking and Emoting](#)

[Part 4: Dreams and the Body](#)

[Part 5: Cortical and Cultural Evolution](#)



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an intense rhythm and pulse which contributes to the magnetized attention of the viewer. The animated images make the pulsatory process of behavior visible, including thinking and feeling. For those who know Stanley Keleman's work, it's a tool to deepen one's understanding of personal experience. For those who are new to his teachings, the video can be a creative start to a different learning experience. They will almost certainly be stunned by the power of the pictures in combination with the music. For a better understanding of the clinical background of the video, the accompanying study of Stanley Keleman's books *Emotional Anatomy* and *Embodying Experience* are recommended.

**Gerhard Zimmermann, MD** is an experienced medical doctor working in the field of behavioral medicine. He runs a private practice in Mainz, Germany, combining his medical knowledge with psychotherapeutic approaches. He trained in gestalt and behavioral psychotherapy, and for the past 22 years has studied extensively with Stanley Keleman, founder of Formative Psychology at Centre of Energetic Studies, Berkeley, California.

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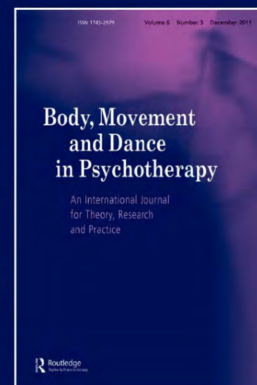
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[www.tandfonline.com/tbmd](http://www.tandfonline.com/tbmd)

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#### Cohn continued from page 12

With Stanley Keleman at the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California, since 1988. Member of the Center for Energetic Studies Professional Group since 1992 and of the Small Group for Advanced Studies since 2009. Founding Director of Centro de Psicologia Formativa® do Brasil since 1995 and Coordinator of its

Professional Program in Formative Psychology . Email:  
[leilacohn@gmail.com](mailto:leilacohn@gmail.com)

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## Reflections on Stanley Keleman

By Irene Kummer, PhD

Stanley Keleman is a researcher through and through – not only where his work is concerned but even more so in his basic attitude to life. From the very start Stanley has worked with visual means be it as a metal sculptor, sketch artist, or making videos for his workshops. In the last ten years he has put an enormous effort into the conception of a DVD for his seminal text, *Emotional Anatomy*, in order to vivify the complex dynamic of the somatic process.

**The richly illustrated book,** *Emotional Anatomy*, is meant to be looked at just as much as read. Its graphic somatic quality makes it so memorable; the vigorous portrayal at once opens up general dimensions and focuses so precisely. The pictures representing the layering of the organism, the body plan, the stress continuum and the somatypes imprint themselves on the reader's mind and serve as a frame of reference for Keleman's current somatic work.

**The idea for *Emotional Anatomy*** began from a collection of Keleman's original sketches; and now for the companion DVD he has organized another visual collection to illustrate the next steps of his visionary journey. His intent in organizing a visual story for *Emotional Anatomy* the DVD is—as he himself puts it—to shape “an experiential, visual and

*poetic representation of the soma's voluntary and involuntary morphogenesis. The narrative speaks of our shared genetic history of developmental shapes and of the possibility for each person to organize their personal anatomic and emotional forming in the drama of human evolution.”*

**It is significant** that the principles of Formative Psychology articulated in the DVD move the focus from an orientation of pathology to an orientation of self-forming: How the soma's ability for epigenesis, which is the ability to change from within the body itself, becomes the primary resource for educating oneself. The key to understanding and changing behavior and feeling is, as always for Keleman, in the body and its actions. The DVD illustrates how the body's innate, anatomical forming patterns

can be voluntarily elicited and used to develop, that is to ‘form’, an individual life of personal meaning, optimism and satisfaction.

**This current work** can best be understood from a background of Keleman's own development. More than forty years ago, Stanley began laying the foundations for his Formative concepts by means of his early publications. His pioneering Formative vision have been consistent over the years when he departed not only from the causal-deterministic point of view, but also from the model of body-mind-spirit as separate entities. His Formative concept has its roots in biology and views the human being as an animate, forming process of anatomical metamorphosis and morphogenesis. Over the years he has continued to develop his

Formative philosophy and, accordingly, its anatomical and anthropological foundation, as well as refine a practical methodology which he has named Formative Psychology®. His enthusiasm is contagious, from year to year he applies current scientific research with experiential practice as he continues to deepen and differentiate his Formative teachings.

**Keleman's Formative concept** is not just an idea it is also a philosophy, a vision and a practical methodology for making a personal embodied life based on voluntary choice. In his work, he combines an intense personal and teaching presence with theoretical elaborations and experiential tutorials. He is a teaching researcher and a researching teacher, conveying that both research and teaching are enjoyable.

**In the years in which** he created the DVD, a certain order of succession emerged: the first part of the video was formed as poetic myth and dream and included images of pulsation and pre-personal processes. Later sections give motion to illustrations from the book, while clips from workshop videos and

enhanced images of real people working further illustrate the Formative concepts. Watching, viewers partake of the vision Keleman created and embodies, and how he translates images and imagination into a living process of concrete, practical somatic experience. Experiencing the video is intended to be user-friendly. There are chapter points so a person can stop, review, and participate by imitating the postures and thus have their own experience of pulsatory assembling and disassembling.

### A New Somatic Language

**The artistic-formative aspect** of the DVD also manifests itself on the level of language creation, which gives the Formative teachings precision and clarity. The departure from conventional philosophical and psychological categories, the transcendence of the traditional model of separation that divides body, psyche and mind, challenged Stanley to create a language that serves as an appropriate vehicle for the Formative tenet. This is not an easy task, for our language has been molded by and infused with basic philosophical assumptions that

constitute our occidental tradition.

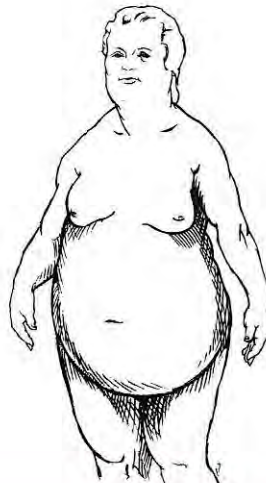
**The word *body*** for instance, refers to the material dimension as opposed to the mental and spiritual. In the Formative understanding, however, it has a holistic or embracing meaning and does not merely denote the physical, but rather encompasses the living process that we are. This is why Stanley often talks about *soma*, about the *somatic-emotional dimension*. He uses the term *embodying experience*. However, this is not to be understood in the sense that there is an "I" distinct from the body, a separate entity that expresses something 'in the body', but rather that we are a bodied process organizing ourselves as a dialogue between all the different somatic layers and between body and it's brain. Therefore he often talks of *bodying, to body forth*. Time and again he grapples to find adequate words. In relation to the four stages of pulsation for example, he initially used the words *swollen, collapsed, rigid* and *dense*, and later replaced the first two with *motile* and *porous* in order to avoid a negative or pathological connotation. He uses the term *somatic soul* in order to describe the depth dimension of the soma.



RIGID  
OBEDIENT  
CONTROLLED



DENSE  
DEFIANT  
SHAMED



SWOLLEN  
INVASIVE  
MANIPULATIVE



COLLAPSED  
COMPLIANT  
COMPROMISING



# “Anatomy is behavior and behavior is anatomical structure; all human functions, cognitive and emotional expressions, are pulsatory bodily acts.”

These are only a few examples that illustrate the genesis of a new terminology to express a new concept that had no verbal language to refer to.

**In other words**, he not only had to create new terms but a new way of conceiving psychological categories to be sure to avoid references to traditional thinking and phrasing. For example, he chose *stages of love* for what is generally called *developmental stages* in other schools. This is more than just a difference of words, it is the expression of another understanding of human life. In order to make particular qualities visible, he also had to find words with which to denote phenomena that had never before been captured in this way. First in *Emotional Anatomy* the book and then again in *Emotional Anatomy* the DVD he has created original images that convey the dynamic, pulsing anatomical movement of the body as well as the soma's emotional expression.

**This process of coining** a new language is not merely about new notions and concepts, it is also about capturing the body's subjective interiority, for which another dimension of expression was needed. In the book *Emotional Anatomy* for instance, we find wording of somatic processes in an idiosyncratic yet precise biological language. Certain passages, however, despite their level of precision, exhibit a poetic quality – such as the summary of the various types of soma. These passages transcend their content and

speak to us through their rhythm and their visual quality. Such passages—aphorisms, poems, myths and dreams—are to be found in all of his works.

## **A Brief Introduction to the Pioneer**

**Stanley Keleman** may be numbered among the pioneers who are reshaping the scientific domain of psychology and positioning it onto a new base – onto the somatic base, which he has elaborated on in the last forty plus years. By means of his concepts and methodology he has introduced a revolutionary vision and method into somatic psychological work. He was one of the pioneers of the Human Potential Movement and went on to create his own Formative Philosophy and Psychology. The body of his work, *Somatic-Emotional Education*, allows us *to take charge of our own life*, to make it personal. In this context, he has revolutionized various fields. He rebelled against the idea of therapy as correcting what has been damaged; choosing instead to take a Formative approach whereby people can learn to use themselves in ways they may not have had the opportunity to learn.

**His biologically based** somatic typology is the basis for his somatic education and he also applied the same Formative principles to stress management and dream work. He has put couple and family therapy on a new basis and developed an entirely new and well-founded somatic concept for the different

stages of life. He redefined the therapeutic relationship not as recovery from the past but as a Formative relationship: How to use past experience and make it part of forming a present and a future, in his words “to form something rather than be formed by it”.

## **Anatomy is Behavior**

**Stanley developed** a theory and method, which is consistently based on biology. He emphasizes behavior is structure and reminds us that we are all a sub-organization of the larger biosphere and as such share with other animate organisms the urge to make structural form, a process that extends into the cellular and tissue layers. The structures and layers of human anatomy are formed along a pulsatory continuum and follow the metamorphosis and morphogenesis of an evolutionary process. Time and again he has taught this, and he founded his *How* method on this basis. In his own words, “*anatomy is behavior and behavior is anatomical structure; all human functions, cognitive and emotional expressions, are pulsatory bodily acts.*”

**According to the core** of Formative Psychology, behavioral action is the basis of experience and intent. Whereas Descartes claimed, “I think and therefore I am.” Stanley maintains: “I am an anatomical organization, and therefore I am.” This also implies: “I act and therefore I am.” Thus, all human functions such as thoughts or emotional expressions, ought to be

defined as organized bodily acts. Thereby he puts the essential questions of traditional philosophy onto a new basis, that is to say, onto the basis of living anatomy. The Formative work not only provides a different way of thinking by not repeating traditional concepts it, in fact, generates a change in paradigm. The starting point in the Formative theory is not what we think or feel, but what we *do*, and especially *how* we do it bodily.

### **The Body's Forming Process and Self-Regulation**

**Management** of one's self is an important key word in Stanley's concept. The regulation of one's self is, first of all, an innate and thus involuntary function, the body follows a developmental plan and regulates itself in the process. This genetically given body is the pre-personal body, as well as inherited constitutional behavioral patterns, by which we are lived. As social beings we also internalize cultural attitudes and give them body expression, as a post-personal body. At the same time, by means of *voluntary, muscular-cortical effort*, another keyword, we may develop a personal body and way of living based on individual freedom to choose. To understand and influence these different functions Stanley refers to the *how-to-method*, consisting of five steps:

*Step one: Organize a body posture of a behavior*

*Step two: Intensify the muscular tension of the posture.*

*Step three: Slowly, step-by-step undo the muscular intensity.*

*Step four: Pause. Wait for new possibilities.*

*Step five: How do I use what I have learned?*

**The How exercise** is a way to recognize what we are doing and most importantly to have voluntary influence of our own innate or socially habituated behavior. Here Stanley makes a key-difference and puts it in the following definition: *"The ability to alter programmed behavior is the basis of developing voluntary self-management and of creating alternate behaviors to those which are inherited; this ability of cortex and muscle to create novel behavior, experiences that have not existed before, is the difference between having a bodied life and forming a personal embodied life (Forming an Embodied Life, 2012 workshop paper).*

**The central concern** to which all other matters are subordinated is to cultivate a personal *embodied* life. But *how* can we exert voluntary personal influence? We cannot exert influence by only focusing on insights, on causal connections or on questions of the why and whence, or by questioning our feelings – the key issue is anatomical motor experience as the basis of behavior and learning voluntary muscular effort to influence it. In this respect Formative Psychology differs from the majority of psychological concepts.

**The How refers** to our motor behavior. By slowing a pattern of movement we learn to experience gradations in a trajectory of behavior. Reflex, instinctual and habituated behavioral patterns are often carried out so quickly and so automatically that they are difficult to influence. Here the how-to-method sets in. Only by slowing down the action pattern can we begin to influence it.

**Beginning with doing** an action we can find out *how* it is organized. This means differentiating an action very slowly, step-by-step, with voluntary muscular-cortical effort, and by

pausing after each singular step. Accordingly, repeating again and again, the process to disorganize and reorganize step-by-step is the means to create layers in an innate pattern that introduces personal choice - the freedom to choose how to act. This is what is meant by self-management. In the pause phase (step 4 of the 5 steps) new possibilities of behavior emerge and we can give them more body by organizing and integrating them in our everyday lives.

**I would like to offer** you a personal example. If I say for instance, "I feel insecure," Stanley will ask: "How do you organize this muscularly?" which enables me to identify and influence what I *am doing*. I can make my posture, then slow down the speed of my action and at the same time, muscularly intensify it. In the book, *Embodying Experience*, Keleman (1987) has exercises to teach how we can differentiate our behavior and how we can create layers, which become available through repetition and practice, and which we can then apply in our daily lives. As we learn to form new layers and choices for behaving, we establish something like a behavioral 'library' in which dialogues between our body and its brain are represented. By differentiating an act we create new behavioral layers that are, in fact, new tissue configurations that become stabilized and established as anatomical memory structures. These memories can be recalled, by "organizing a pattern of behavior" and then elaborated on by using the How exercise. In this way we achieve a voluntary, personal way of governing ourselves. The Formative method shows what it means to become a unique and personal human being, empowered to regulate and form him/herself. This implies a process of evolution, which stands for a lifelong commitment, both in one's private and professional life.

## Somatic Practice Exercises

**Keleman has developed** an original practice protocol - *somatic practice exercises* - to help people experience their inherited and habituated behaviors and to learn to influence themselves in an individual way. There is no performance expectation or rote way of practice. The aim is to learn about one's own individual behavior and way of organizing. There is no right or wrong, the purpose is to explore and form *your* way; *personal* behaviors which for you are meaningful and satisfying. The DVD shows this process visually and viewers can participate.

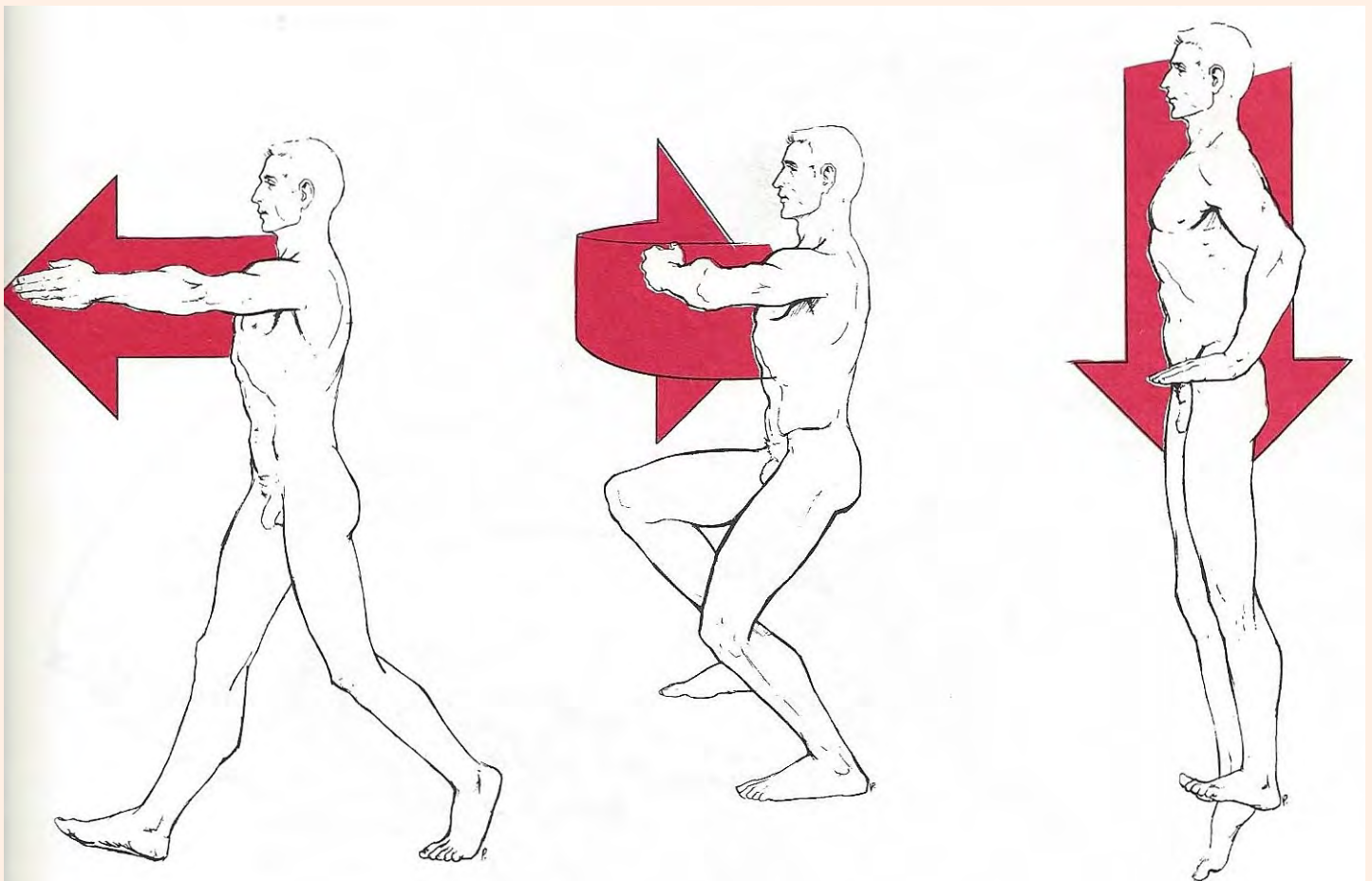
**The methodological** aspects of the How practice and of other somatic exercises are based on the neurobiological function that the differentiation of behavior organizes new synaptic connections, which in turn – by means of repetition – become available as new or modified behaviors. From the very beginning

Stanley based his concept and methodology on biology, and he continually integrates the latest results of neurobiological research in his own process of deepening the Formative method.

**Voluntary effort** generates emotional and feeling responses that can be differentiated and voluntarily influenced. Practicing the style of somatic exercise creates a *personal repertoire of behavior patterns*, which become richer in time. We learn for example how to differentiate *reaching out, clinging to, giving and receiving*, or emotional patterns such as *waiting, insecurity, shame, anxiety, worry, humiliation or generosity*. As we internalize and habituate the protocol of these exercises we can continue, for the rest of our lives, the process of forming ourselves. This somatic-emotional education should not only be considered a process of healing but also the human adventure of metamorphosis and morphogenesis

par excellence. During this adventure, we may become our own unique work of art, that is to say, *a self-poem*, as Stanley puts it in one of his unedited papers. In his understanding, we are more than our inherited body we are also the creator of a personal self, by differentiating inherited patterns through voluntary muscular–cortical effort we make them personal.

**As human beings** we thereby have the choice whether we want to be lived by our instinctual body, by the demands of society or by personal choice. Choosing to live Formatively is a learned skill and a life long endeavor. At every stage of life, young adult, fully formed adult, mature and older adult and even in the late stages of aging the relevant Formative question is: *Which new structure/behavior wants to be formed and bodied into the world, and how can I support this new personal layer in my Formative process?*





**The *How* exercise** is valid and applicable in the clinical area, as well as in the field of personal development, in private as well as in public life, and it is accessible for people from different social levels. The most important message is to go on practicing the method of the five steps and staying involved with the Formative process. *“An attitude, an organization, a motor pattern has intent and how that intent is formed and governed is a voluntary act: it is not just wanting an outcome it is wanting to form an outcome. Sometimes it may not be so much about influencing your life but rather governing your life. It becomes more and more urgent, when you get older, how do you govern your changing age, how do you govern yourself when the body begins to speak about how you have used it, about changing your life style. So voluntary muscular effort is more than a reorganizing event it is a governing event”* (Somatic Practice Retreat, 2012 workshop).

### Practical Application

**It is of importance** to gain access to Stanley’s work by means of experiencing the *How* exercises since all aspects of his concepts lead to these. His methodology rests upon a multilayered concept about the somatic reality of the human being and his books describe what ought to be understood by a bodied and embodied life. They demonstrate how we can regulate, differentiate our behavior, and how we can organize and connect the three layers of our self: The *pre-personal* or *instinctual* self, the *post-personal* or *social* self, as well as the *personally formed* self. Also, this concept is not static. Forming oneself is an elastic continuum of changing shapes. To illustrate this Stanley uses the image of an accordion to show stages of pulsing in and pulsing out.

### The Stress Continuum

The Stress Continuum speaks to how the soma meets a threat or challenge. The book and the DVD illustrate vividly the shapes and stages of the body ranging from mild interest to despair and resignation. Whether a challenge or threat originates from inside the body itself or from the outside environment the soma has similar responses. Which shapes dominate depends on the body’s instinctual response and on the severity and frequency of the challenge/threat. Beginning with startle we see the pattern of alert, which is focused attention. If the challenge is perceived as a threat the response pattern is fight or flight. If the threat is even more severe the body responds with confusion and helplessness. An overwhelming threat or demand produces the shapes of defeat or collapse. The emergency reflex is innate and is only meant for momentary usage. However, when in danger, perceived or real, we may not be able to govern our response and instinct prevails. If the stressor is not major, the response dissipates when the danger is over. But if the intensity of the threatening situation is overwhelming, or if it lasts for a long time or is repeated again and again, the reflex turns into habituated stress patterns; and can even become a way of life. The soma’s responses to stress and ways for self-influence and self-management are made visual in the DVD and are further explained in Keleman’s book in *Patterns of Distress* (1989)

**The foundation** of everything that is alive is pulsation. Thus, pulsation is basic to how Keleman conceptualizes the different body structures and patterns of behavior which among all the comparable typologies must be considered the most biologically grounded.

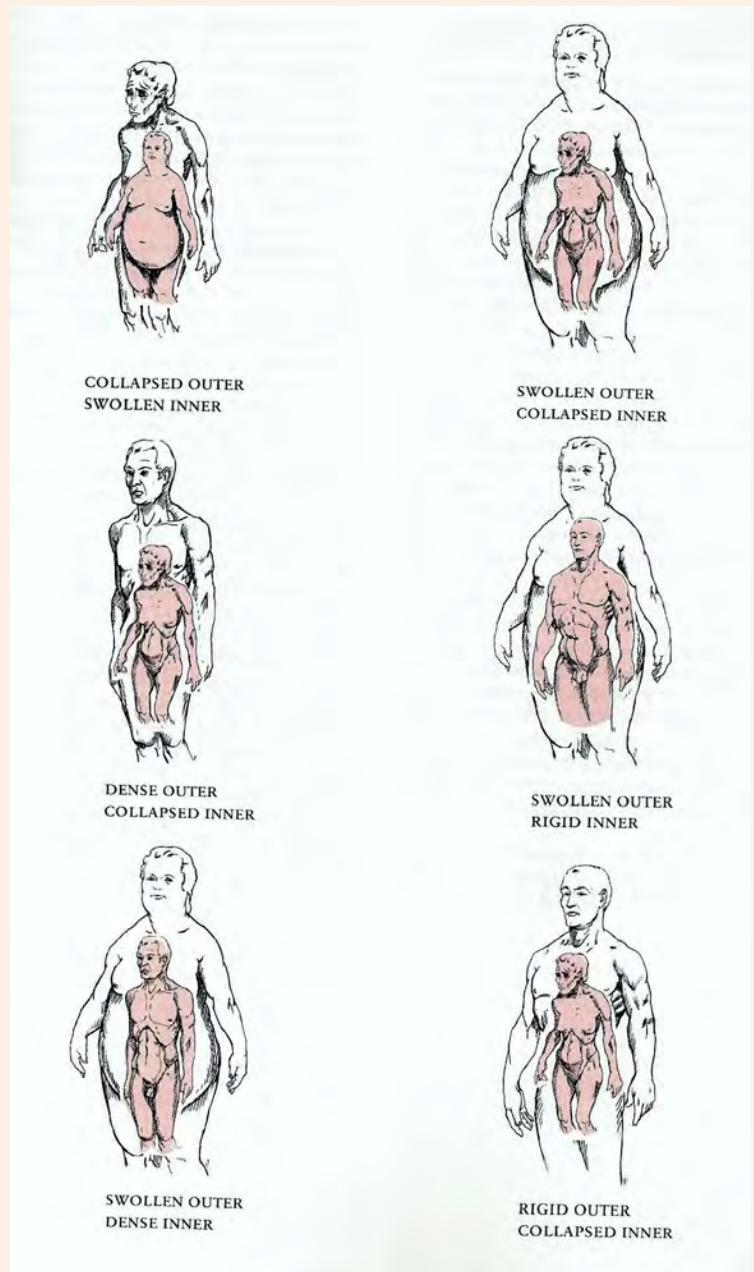


**Moreover, there** are no borrowings of psychodynamic concepts as is the case with Reich's or Lowen's typologies. Stanley's typology begins from the four phases of the pulsatory continuum: *Motile, porous, rigid, dense*. The key question when working with oneself or with another is: Where in this continuum of shape/behavior does a person find themselves in need of reorganizing or self governing? Again the DVD makes the pulsatory continuum visible as behavior and feeling. Learning how to influence our behavior comes from both seeing and experiencing.

**Life challenges** can cause disturbances in pulsation. The organism may accommodate by seeking to stabilize itself by limiting its range of pulsation. This limiting of the pulse pattern results in structural and behavior inhibitions which can become habituated. For example, a dense compressed pattern of self-protection results in the muting of pulsation which limits the range of expression. However, one could be in a compressed pattern and at the same time be in a motile pattern expressed as an over excited brain and quickened heartbeat. If a person does not know voluntary self-influence, he/she may have a desire to be more contactful with others and not know how. A person with a porous pattern may find themselves unable to contain their excitement and need other people to give them boundaries. There may be desire to hold their ground and he/she does not know how. Because pulsation can change its pattern and location we are dealing with very dynamic concepts, ones best learned through experience.

**Somatic insults** at any stage of life can become part of the somatic-emotional structure of the person. In his book *Love* (1984) Stanley shows how structural inhibition can also be linked with the stages of love: *to care for – to care about – to have interest in – to cooperate with another*. These stages of love are behavioral patterns so in any of the four stages the organism may become *motile (swollen), porous (collapsed), rigid (compartmentalized), or dense (compacted)*. These somatype categories represent a guideline for the understanding of the human dynamic, but the *somatic reality* of every living human is always complex and multilayered. Thus, a person may be outwardly rigid, inwardly porous, in the upper part of the body dense, in the lower part of the body motile, and so on. Consequently, each body is a layered, gestalt of combined or mixed somatypes.

**Inherited traits** are generally impossible to 'get rid of', but they can be reorganized and modified by means of the method of the five steps and somatic practice exercises. One may learn, for instance, to give oneself more containment and organize firmer boundaries within a porous structure, or to melt and to become softer to



modify a rigid structure. What is of overriding importance, however, is the differentiation of a pattern of action within an already existing structure, which can be influenced by learning voluntary muscular-cortical influence.

**During the development** of his Formative concepts, Stanley referred to the constitutional types, described by William Sheldon: *endomorph, mesomorph, ectomorph*, originating from the three embryonic germinal layers. He adapted Sheldon's categories to behavioral/structural patterns which are also grounded in embryology and are closer to the reality of human experience and behavior. Whereas the slow, steady assimilating *endomorphic* pulse of the viscera is dominant for one human being; the linear, firm, goal-oriented, *mesomorphic* pulse of the

muscle and skeletal layers may be dominant for another; and for yet another, it is the fast, flickering *ectomorphic* pulse of the neural and dermal layers. In every person the quality of one of the layers is dominant while the others exist in supporting roles.

**However**, our dominant inherited constitution is not a static given either. We may learn, as a mesomorphic human being, for instance, to regulate and differentiate our instinctual impulse for powerful, quick, muscular response by organizing layers within our constitutionally given behavior. We may also learn how we pass from one constitutional layer into the next one and how we may handle our constitutional dilemmas. The most important message is that even though our constitution is genetically given, we can learn to influence it, and in this way to have some say in our destiny

**Modern tendencies** in the psychological field are giving up static definitions of development, character and lifespan in favor of a more dynamic concept. Stanley

Keleman continues to be a pioneer in his field, focusing on a dynamic view of the human being as a Formative process, pointing out that we are essentially a dialogue between different layers of our universal and individual existence: the pre-personal, our inherited body, the post-personal, our social learning, and the personal, the self formed through voluntary effort.

**Emotional Anatomy DVD** vividly expresses his pioneering vision of the human being's somatic-emotional and psychological development. The DVD offers visual access to the soma's internal processes and, perhaps most importantly, it offers a way to participate in the forming of oneself. Working along by imitating the behavioral actions in the DVD is a great help in understanding the dynamic and multi-layered concept of Formative Psychology as it brings readers up to date with Keleman's latest research and practice. Stanley has again produced a great pioneering effort giving vision and voice to support voluntary self-forming and self-governing as a lifelong endeavor of meaning and satisfaction.

**Irene Kummer, PhD**, studied literature and psychology in Zurich, Ottawa, and Freiberg. She is an individual psychotherapy and supervisor. Since 1976, she has studied Formative Psychology with Stanley Keleman. In addition to maintaining a private psychotherapy practice, she has taught literature studies at Tech University, psychology at the University of Applied Psychology, and the Alfred Adler Institute in Zurich. Since 1990, she has been a director at the Center for Form and Development where she also teaches. She is the author of various books and articles on psychology and literature. She can be reached at [irenekummer@bluewin.ch](mailto:irenekummer@bluewin.ch)

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# My Journey with Stanley Keleman

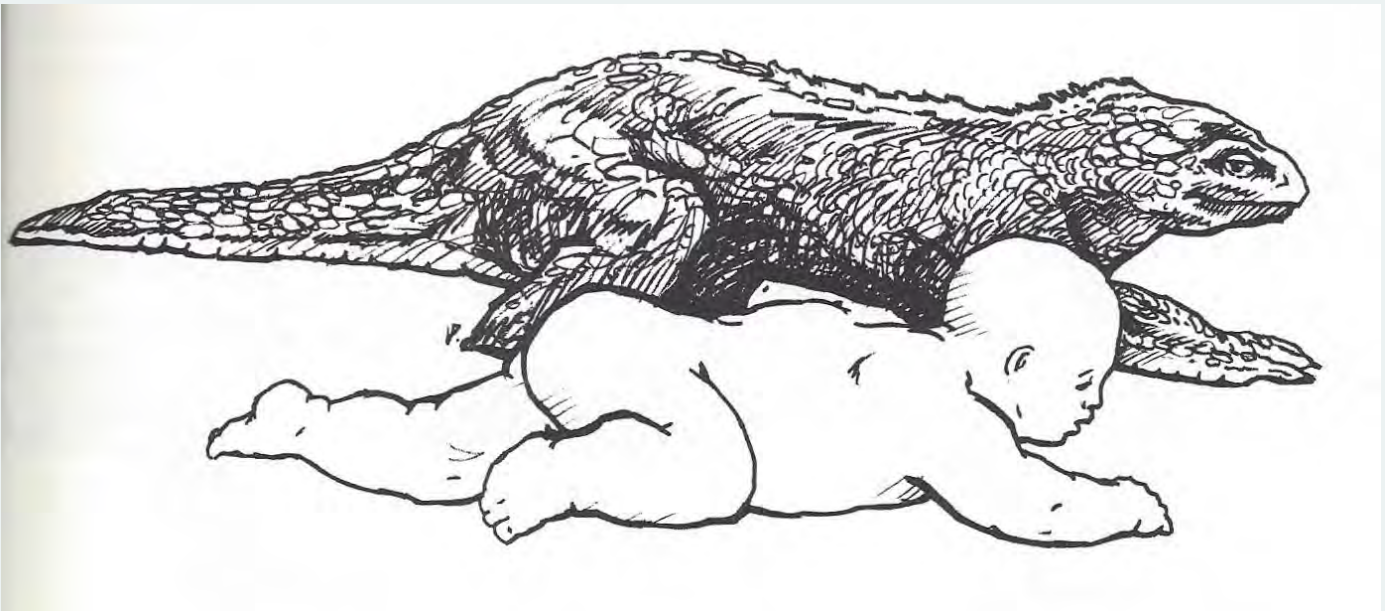
By Gine Dijkers

The first time I participated in a workshop with Stanley Keleman was years ago in Zürich. It was a dream workshop that did not follow the usual symbolic interpretative approach.

Reading his books I was curious to understand his ‘language of the body’. Now listening to him and seeing him work with people, I realized that here I could get answers to my questions about how to work with people without getting lost in interpretations, images, or in striving toward the goal of being your ‘true self’, being ‘natural’ or finding ‘enlightenment’.

**Stanley used a language** grounded in a lived and living anatomy. He spoke about how we, as human beings, are biological and physiological processes in an ongoing evolution of forming our humanity. Using embryological imagery he illustrated his way of seeing the human being and by the way he talked about it I could see and experience how we, from conception on, grow from single cells to multi-celled and multi-layered complex anatomical human shapes. On the one hand our body grows by an innate programmed body plan and on the other hand we are born with the ability to influence

this plan. If we learn to grow ourselves by voluntary self-influence of our inherited acts we are capable of personalizing our biological inheritance; and this growing and evolving is made possible by life’s innate urge: To do, to act. Then Stanley said something so remarkable: Growing oneself by voluntary influence does not stop when we are a full grown adult or even when we are getting older, rather we are able to participate in our own forming our entire life. It is an ongoing process till our death. I had not thought about this before and it was quite a revelation to me.

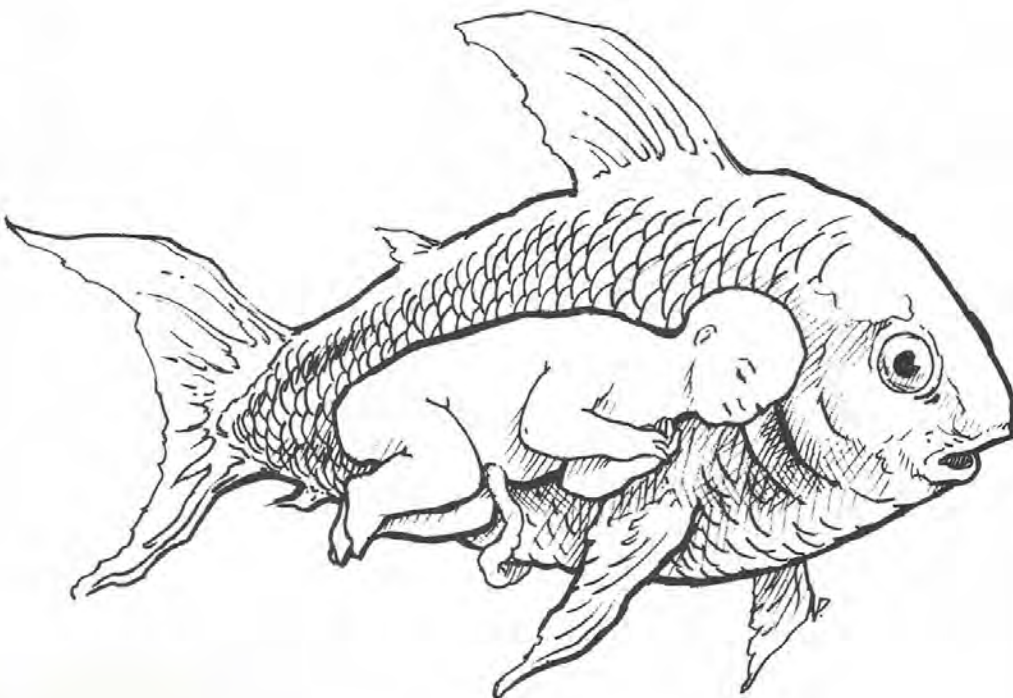


**As a young woman** I made my study in physical education so I understood about human movement. The way we develop is by doing – a child learns to walk by doing it and making errors so that he can learn from it and make little changes in the way he walks – in this way life is an experimental journey. When I began to study with Stanley, I also began a new life journey. An adult journey of learning *how* we do something — quick, slow, intense, soft—and how we can influence that and experience other ways of doing/behaving, which we can repeat so that we create a richer library of body acts and

ways of behaving, or in other words have more choices how we want to behave in different situations.

**Over the years** working with him, I learned to know myself by how I embodied myself. Self-knowing became knowing my internal state, how I form my actions and response toward myself and toward the world, the different time frames of my responses and their impact on me, my way of orienting in the world by experiencing how I act within myself and in the world.

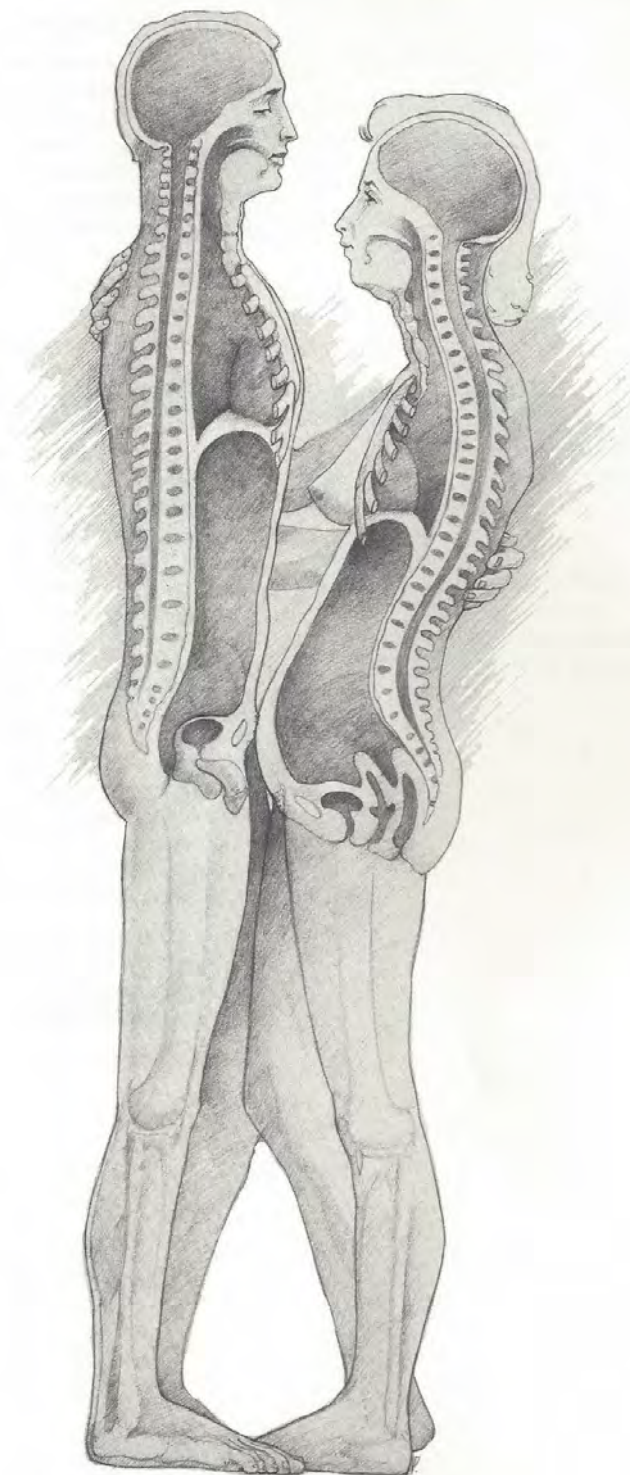
The term ‘self-knowing’ became “how do I do this, how can I repeat it, what is it function for me and how can I influence it” without judging or looking for someone or something to blame or using my past as an excuse for the way I behaved. Stanley taught me that I am the tool from which I can learn and form my life. From my first experience in the workshop in Zurich where I learned to use my bodily experience as my guide, I have continued to deepen my understanding and experience of what it means to live a Formative life.



**Not so long ago** I had a dramatic opportunity to repeat this process of self-forming.

**I am walking** with my husband in a hospital for an intake visit. He needs a joint replacement, and I was very concerned about what I could do to make this stressful experience easier for him. Walking in the corridors, seeing people lying on stretchers waiting with no visible interest in the surrounding, evoked in me feelings and thoughts as “I don’t want to be connected with them, I do not want to see this, I don’t want to be like them”, and at the same time “this is private, I cannot look”. But I found it very difficult not to look. So my primary, involuntary reaction was to brace myself and look away by focusing on the pictures on the walls. I also recognized that by trying to avoid the other patients, I was not present for my husband in the way I wanted to be. So, I began the familiar process of engaging my pattern of distancing by increasing the micro-muscular intensity of my bodily responses. This act made more vivid how I was stiffening myself and holding myself back and turning away, trying to control my responses and judging them at the same time. Invoking the ‘do it more and do it less’ practice, I was able to change my response of avoidance and feel more present in myself and more present with my husband. In the difficult days that followed I experienced more and more knowing that being really present in myself was the best way to be present with him and accompany him through this hard time. I realized this was his journey and in many ways I could not make it easier for him. What I could do was reorganize myself and have a different kind of presence so I could be there for both of us.

**Thank you Stanley by being there in my life.**



**Gine Dijkers** is a somatic psychotherapist in the Netherlands. She is co-founder and a director of the “Institut fur Formative Psychology” in Solingen, Germany. Over the past decade she has formed a computerized archive of the complete works of Stanley Keleman. She can be reached at [gine.dijkers@planet.nl](mailto:gine.dijkers@planet.nl)

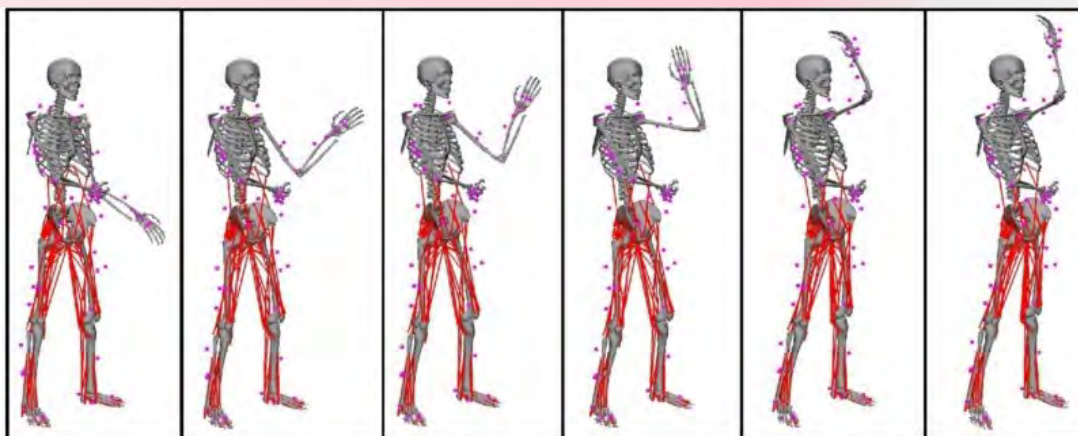


*Gootnick continued from page 13*

my excess muscular tension and adrenal (sympathetic) arousal. Doing the exercises helped me form new neural-muscular maps, which supported the growth of new skills and muscle memories essential for improvement. I practiced being less reactive and more responsive, malleable, and pulsatory. Learning to grab less inside gave me the feeling of having more interior space, which in turn gave me the subjective experience of having more time. This allowed me to approach the music with a "less hurried" attitude. Also, applying the principle of conservation of effort ("less is more") was helpful for dealing with problems like vocal fatigue and diminished motor coordination.

**As I continued to apply** VME while using my instrument and voice, I developed enough competence to play with other musicians in paid public performances. With each performance, I gained more experience and was able to fine-tune how I used VME. I used my performance errors as a guide for how I was not managing my form. I learned about playing based on what "I can" do. I worked to de-intensify my internal critic and its dictates about how "I should" play. This shift in orientation ("What is the aim of my performance?") helped reorganize my expectations and reduce some of the stress and pressure of performing.

**Over time** I have learned to extend the application of formative methods to other situations. I now use VME before and during music lessons with my teacher, before and during band rehearsal, and before going on stage to perform. I work with the micro-muscular startle pattern in my hands and fingers, using the 5-steps to



intensify and de-intensify my excess tension. This helps to bring about a more parasympathetic state while I perform, and reinforces the muscle memory of being more at ease while playing. The hands teach the cortex. Stanley (2014) discusses this relationship in his article: *The Hand as a Brain*. I have learned to do this hand exercise while I'm on stage. I look for an opportunity to put one or both hands in my pockets, or behind my back, and quickly increase and then decrease the effort (tension) level for about five seconds. This helps down-shift my anxiety, increases malleability in my hands, which improves my playing, and helps me make better contact with the audience.

**As I experiment** with forming my musical Second Adult, Stanley has consistently shared his Formative Perspective about what I am growing. He has strongly encouraged my new musical pursuits, and he understands the significant challenges that performing in public can present for my introverted temperament. A few years ago he suggested that I offer workshops and private sessions to other musicians and performers, to help them with their performance anxiety issues. He pointed out that it I could teach them directly from my personal bodied experience. We agreed that it would be a good vehicle for re-organizing my personal and professional identity, and bringing my musical and psychological worlds together in a common endeavor.

**For the past several years** I have been performing music in public and presenting formative workshops at music camps and conferences. My workshop is called: "Taking Charge of Your Performance: How I Learned to Love the Microphone". I am most grateful to Stanley for his ongoing co-bodilying and for these opportunities to learn about the deep practicality of the Formative perspective and its methods. I continue to apply VME as often as I can. Using these life tools, I can continue deepening and differentiating my self as I form new ways to live as a musician-psychologist.

**Andrew Gootnick, PhD** is a licensed psychotherapist, performance psychologist and performing musician. He uses the methods of Formative Psychology® developed by Stanley Keleman at the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley CA. Andrew has been practicing psychotherapy in San Rafael and Berkeley CA for 35 years. He performs as a vocalist, and on mandolin and electric bass. He provides workshops and personal consultation for musicians and performers -- teaching them practical body-based strategies for managing stress and developing confident creative expression.  
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# Stanley Keleman

## Original Thinker and Contributor

By Karyne Wilner, PsyD

One of the most original thinkers in the field of somatics, Stanley Keleman has used his unique knowledge of the of the body's functioning to help people grow, change, become unstuck, and transition from one life phase to the next. A somatic pioneer, Keleman perceives the body, unmistakably, as the center of the self. Through Formative Psychology, the name for his life's work, he shows that people can be educated to change their bodies so as to experience life more fully.

**According to Keleman** shapes change over time. The body's shape is both affected by nature and by one's voluntary effort to influence it. Bodies are inherited according to the rules of genetics, but immediately thereafter the innate structure changes due to the challenges and stressors of life. For instance, a five-year old responds to the yelling and screaming at the family dinner table by raising his shoulders in fear. So when this child grows up with shoulders locked and raised up around his neck, he cannot reach out to make contact. If he were then to seek help for relationship issues, a formative somatics practitioner could help this young man learn new muscular approaches to life.

**Keleman's somatic emotional method** teaches individuals that they can participate in their own formative life process. By looking at body shapes Keleman can show workshop participants how their life experience, emotional stance, behavior, and belief systems have been shaped so far and what wants to emerge. Educating people to use voluntary muscular effort to influence emotional structures, cortical beliefs, and psychological beliefs can turn their lives around.

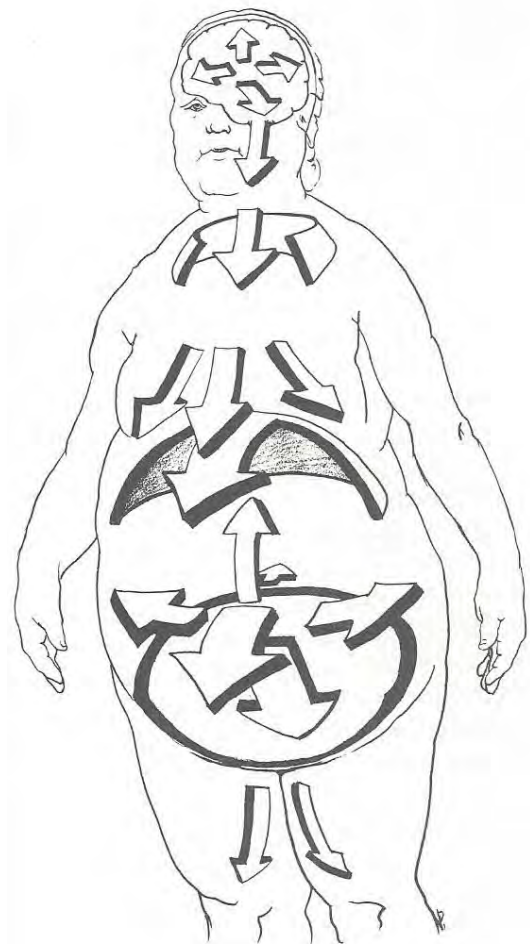
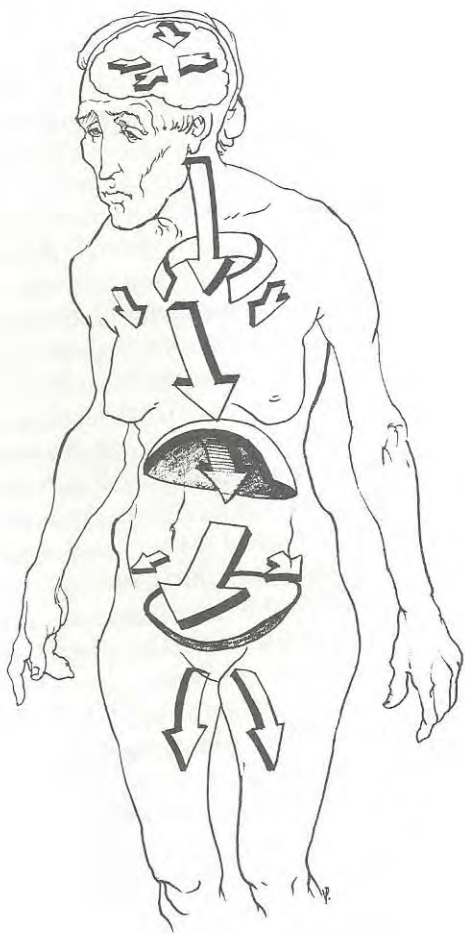
**Because body shapes** have the ability to continually form and reform, one can have more than one somatic self waiting to be embodied. Each new shape represents

Reach  
Touch  
Receive

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BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY

another self wanting to be lived. People have the opportunity to form bodies appropriate for their age, work with the feelings and challenges of emerging shapes, and explore each unique individual identity as it emerges. The body process is the basis for how individuals form the self and their world view.

**It is no wonder** that Stanley Keleman has been honored by both the European Association for Body Psychotherapy and the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy and has received an honorary doctorate degree from Saybrook University. By showing that the body is more than a series of innate reactions and that people can use voluntary action to enhance their lives, Keleman teaches people to trust their bodies, to handle their emotions appropriately, and to have a better and richer connection to themselves.



**Karyne B. Wilner, PsyD**, directs the Professional Training Program in Core Energetics and Holistic Psychotherapy in Middletown, RI and is an adjunct professor in the Holistic Counseling Program at Salve Regina University in Newport, RI. She is the former Assistant Director of the Institute for Core Energetics, Associate Director of the Australian Institute of Core Energetics, Senior Director of the Brazil Institute of Core Energetics, Board Member of the Core Energetics Foundation, and Director of Drexel University's Counseling Center. She has traveled widely giving lectures, workshops, and seminars, and she has written numerous journal articles about somatics and psychology. Her work emphasizes the unconscious in the body and the relationship between the pelvis and the heart. She worked closely with John C. Pierrakos, MD, her mentor, who founded Bioenergetics and Core Energetics.





# Forming a Maturing and Older Adult: How Formative Psychology and Practice is Applied in a Group for Maturing and Older Adults

By Carola Butschied, Esq.

**After more than 20 years** of professional study and personal experience with Stanley Keleman, I feel his Formative approach deep in my bones, in my style of living, and in the process of my teaching. It has been a rich and rewarding experience to represent his work in Europe where I co-founded and direct the "Institut für Formative Psychologie" in Solingen, Germany. Recently I participated in Stanley's 2014 Professional Seminar in Berkeley, California, and again I realize how lucky I have been to meet him and to have the chance to learn with him, and how much he has enriched my life in all its layers.

**It is a special pleasure** and satisfaction for me to share the knowledge and experiences of Formative Psychology with clients and colleagues who are sitting in the same 'boat' with me as we deal with challenges of getting older. At the Institute in Solingen we have an ongoing group, "The adventure of getting older". We explore somatically and Formatively what it means to get older. We use Stanley's Formative method to learn about our individual process of becoming and being an older adult, and we choose specific exercises to explore this stage of living. The enthusiasm for learning goes on and on because Formative Psychology gives a future approach and brings an optimism about living whatever age we inhabit.

**Members of the group** share an interest in finding alternatives to

society's stereotypes of what it means to be aging and older; alternatives that include being vital and responsive without trying to remain 'youthful' and endlessly pursue a lifestyle of a previous stage of living. We explore new perspectives and a psychology based in how we are embodied and how we can create our own personal ways behaving and feeling appropriate to our age. Learning to create new personal experiences is both empowering and a great adventure.

**The premise of the group** is that neither society nor instinct prepares us for older age. Society views changes that come with the process of getting older as 'less', as loss or diminishment. Instinct may tell us to conserve ourselves by muting excitement and limiting muscle movement, but maturity and old age

do not necessarily mean a lessening of excitement or acting. As each stage of living brings changing patterns of excitement so does aging but this is not the same as 'less'. Rather it is forming the next stage of our embodiment. The participants in our programs come to understand that a vital and satisfying life means influencing their patterns of excitement, learning to recognize them and to voluntarily differentiate them. From Stanley's Formative perspective it is our life task to learn to manage our excitement patterns and create a personal life. A satisfying life does not just somehow happen. It needs a vision, coming from our own embodiment, and it needs commitment and a practice. We have the choice to form our life with voluntary effort, as best as we can, or we will be formed by other forces.



**Doing a somatic exercise** in a slow measured way creates a relationship within ourselves that we experience as self-intimacy. Self-intimacy is an experiential knowing of subjective experience that we can recognize and repeat. 'Slow' means to take the time to make distinctions in a pattern of action. Slowing the trajectory of a behavior is self-created behavior, which allows a person to make connections inside themselves; it allows the soma to interact with itself and initiates a process of creating a new dimension. From there we have the choice to create an "unhurried life", we form a subjectivity, an interiority that give values and meaning to our lives.

**In the older adult group**, we seek to explore our own internal patterns such as: Is there something in me - a rigidity, a porosity, a pulsation, a feeling, a thought - that I experience as an intruder to my established identity? How do I protect myself against feelings or behaviors I don't want or that I experience as threatening? How do I experience uncertainty or deal with being alone? How do I organize how I want to be seen in the world?

**We have found particularly useful** the exercises of voluntary muscular effort dealing with the "hurry up" pattern. On the one hand, we learn to recognize our established pattern; on the other hand, we learn to recognize our pulsatory reality and that there may be a difference between 'what I want to live and what I can live'. The differentiation of established patterns of behavior and the repetition of new patterns give us a choice. We are not trapped in reproducing behavior that has been developed for past situations.

**People who work with the process** over time have told me things like:

"I realize, that I don't have to feel bad about or criticize my past life, it is all part of me and I use it to make the next step. I am looking forward to my coming shapes"

"I enjoy my life. I am rejoicing."

**After seeing the DVD *Emotional Anatomy***, one woman said, 'That is me. I knew it already, but now I know it on a deeper level. I am this process. I feel optimistic. I am containing waves of gratitude and love. Life is good.'

**Carola Butscheid Esq.** is a psychotherapist, cofounder director of the "Institut für Formative Psychologie" in Solingen, Germany, where she teaches Formative Psychology and holds a private practice. She has studied for the last 25 years with Stanley Keleman. email. Carola.Butscheid@gmx.de

Doing a  
somatic  
exercise in a  
slow  
measured  
way creates a  
relationship  
within  
ourselves  
that we  
experience as  
self-intimacy.



# Voluntary Muscular Effort Creates Self-Agency

By Christina Loeffel, MFT

**Writing is an act of creation. Beautiful writing is a beautiful creation.** I used to practice calligraphy for hours to make beautiful letters with the movements of my hand. The hand, I've learned from Stanley, is like a little brain, communicating to, with, and for us. Watching the hand gestures of myself and others is fascinating: we are talking to our inside and the outside. Engaging our hand gestures is educational: slowing the gesture down and making small muscular shifts produces personal discoveries. This elegantly simple act connects us to ourselves in new and profound ways. In my current singing lessons, slowing down an action teaches me what I am doing by the feedback I receive from myself. I can compare one sound with another and teach myself how much, how long, and where, in myself, pressure is needed to make the desired sound. Although I did not know Stanley and Formative Psychology® when I was learning calligraphy, I was using a similar process to teach myself to apply varied gradients of pressure in my hand and fingers to create the desired shape of the letters.

**Learning is an interaction** of involuntary behaviors with voluntary ones. The body uses voluntary muscular effort (VME) to differentiate involuntary (inherited and habituated) behaviors to form options for acting in the world. Recognizing the function of VME, Stanley Keleman articulated a Formative process and practice for purposefully engaging the involuntary with voluntary effort. Using this practice, people can learn how they are forming themselves

and how they can grow and influence themselves. The application of VME, both clinically and personally, seems endless to me. From Stanley I understand that pulsation makes the evolutionary life process open-ended and this Formative practice I am doing utilizes the inherited pulsatory function, a back and forth, expansion and contraction process with rotation. This pulsatory rotatory action forms dimension, which creates open-ended possibilities.

**Recently**, a client was moving his hands toward and away from his torso as he tried to describe his experience of feeling happy. I suggested he take the time to engage what he was doing by using VME to slow the motion of his hands. The rotation of his hands became vividly apparent, and he recognized a calmness generated by this movement. He liked the rhythmical pulsatory motion and how it made him feel. From my work, I could understand that experiencing



# Soma is not the opposite of psyche and mind is not separate from the body.

pulsation is what he identifies as happiness. In contrast, when recounting an experience of distress, his hands were moving in a stiff, up and down, mechanical motion. Pointing this out to him, we began a dialogue about these two different ways of using himself. I could guide him in using VME to investigate and influence these two action patterns and learn about their effects on his experience of himself. By making small changes in his muscular efforts, he could form a dialogue with different personal shapes of himself.

**I know from my work** with Stanley that my client's hands are teaching his cortex new ways of using himself, adding to what Stanley calls his 'library of shapes'. I know that maps, pathways, are forming in the cortex as we use VME. I know that pulsatory waves are transmitting information from our actions in one part of us to other parts of us. I know these things for myself because my long-term interest in the body's relationship to psychology brought me to Stanley who understands psychological experience as a biological phenomenon.

**Prior to working with Stanley**, I was educated as an undergraduate in biological and behavioral psychology and as a graduate in Jungian depth psychology. During the 15 years between acquiring these two degrees, I practiced yoga and meditation, pursued dance therapy as a potential profession, worked in

psychological settings, and participated in an array of therapies birthed during the Human Potential Movement. I couldn't accept the pathological Western hierarchy I kept encountering that placed matter beneath spirit. Soma is not the opposite of psyche and mind is not separate from the body. The Jungian's efforts to resolve dualism led me to include Stanley's work in my master's thesis on the relationship of psyche and soma. The mind/body split and mind-over-matter models do not exist in his language. Stanley's relentless pursuit to describe experience in language grounded in biological process gave me a non-hierarchical, non-pathological evolutionary appreciation of human existence.

**A person doesn't have to know** Formative Psychology® to recognize the ordering function of this language and benefit from using VME. We do, however, have to educate ourselves by experiencing ourselves somatically. Theories and concepts about the body will not substitute for direct experience, and the language we use to describe our experiences can either make a personal formative order or seduce us into a life of ideas.

**I have learned from Stanley** how organisms form themselves and this is the springboard from which I am working with what appears in myself and in my office. Formative Psychology® is not bodywork. It is an educational process of bodily engaging a person with themselves

in the context of their difficulties. This process gives a person agency, the ability to form actions to accomplish intentions. VME is how I grew a maternal body for nurturing and loving my son and also my two stepchildren. Stepmother is one of the more complicated archetypes in our modern society, as illustrated by its negative images in fairy tales. Formative Psychology® relates to most human dilemmas as developmental challenges rather than pathologies, so I focused my step-parenting efforts on growing a mature personal body inside the family body I was inheriting. My challenges, just as in singing and calligraphy, were in forming the desired somatic shapes. Using VME to make small shifts in my responses made me the agent of forming my own maternal archetype.

**Christina Loeffel** is a licensed marriage family therapist working with individuals and couples in San Francisco and Marin County, California. She has many years of studying and working in the field of psychology including a B.A. in Psychology (West Virginia University, 1972), and an M.A. in Counseling Psychology with a Depth Emphasis (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 1987). She has been studying with Stanley Keleman at The Center for Energetic Studies since 1990 and uses Formative Psychology® in her private practice and supervision of students and interns. Her web address is [www.formingyourlife.com](http://www.formingyourlife.com)

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