



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

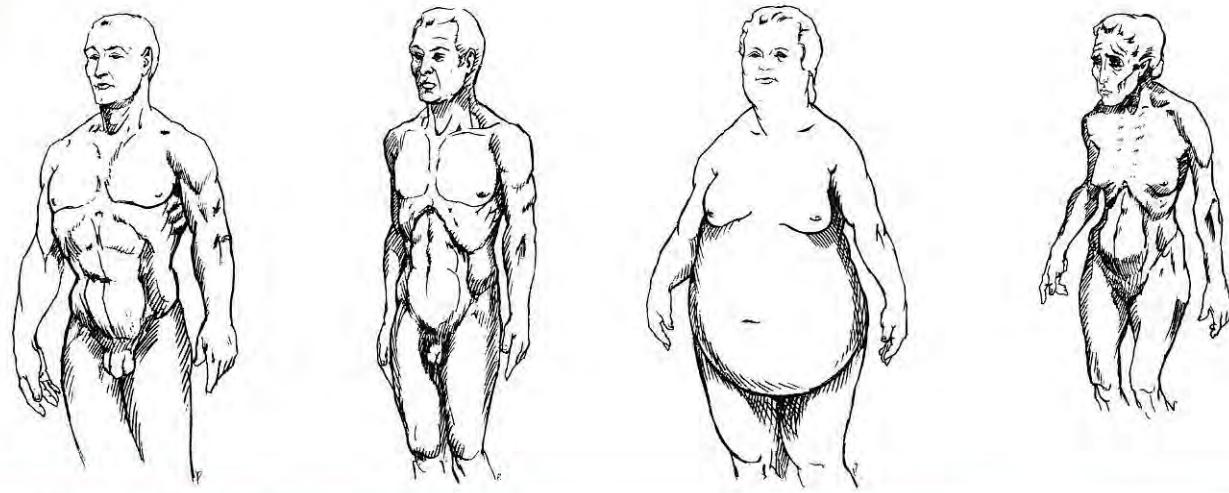
enhanced images of real people working further illustrate the Formative concepts. Watching, viewers partake of the vision Keleman created and embodies, and how he translates images and imagination into a living process of concrete, practical somatic experience. Experiencing the video is intended to be 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 its 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.

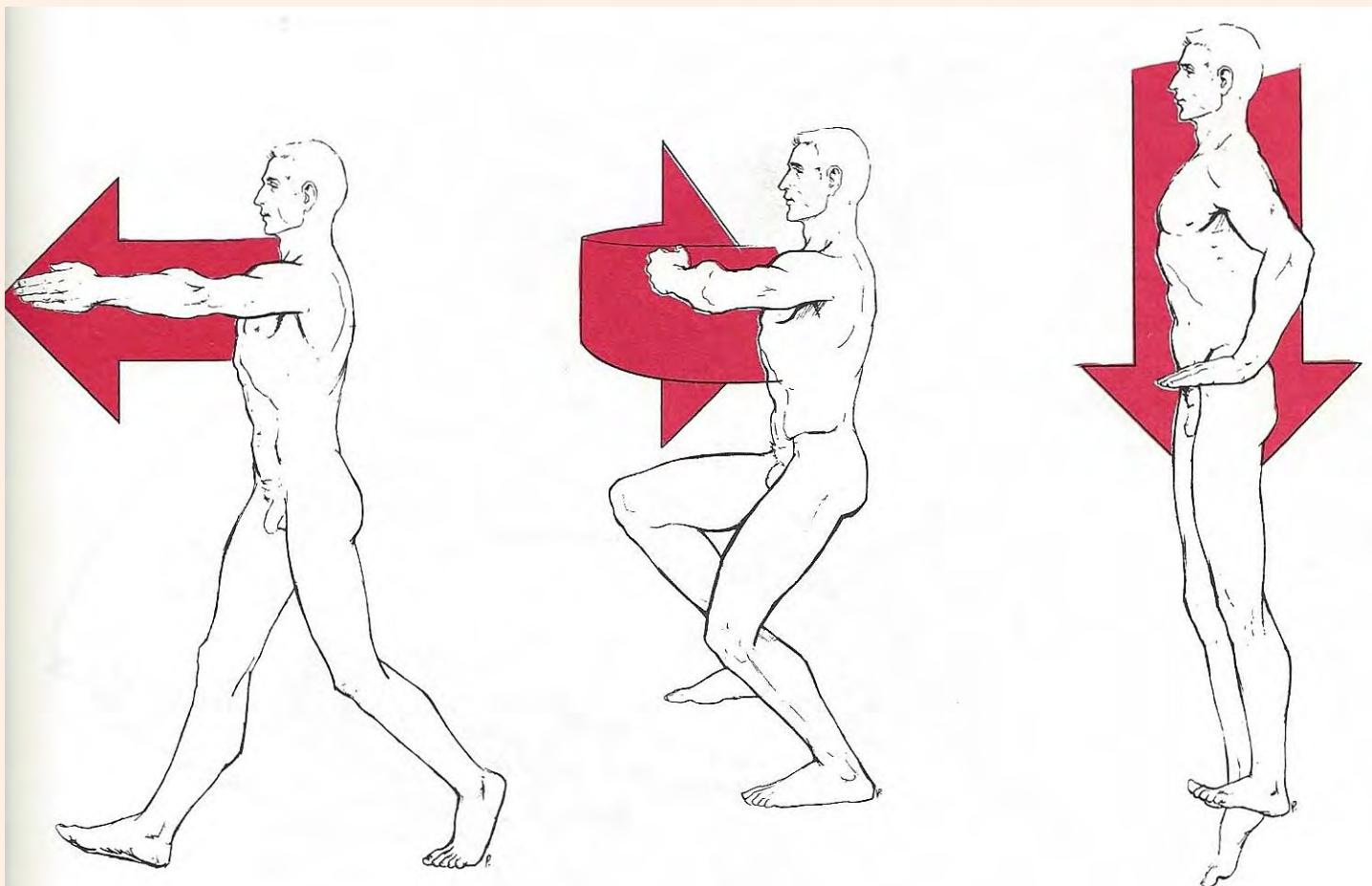
The methodological aspects of the How practice and of other somatic exercises are based on the neurobiological function that the differentiation of behavior organizes new synaptic connections, which in turn – by means of repetition – become available as new or modified behaviors. From the very beginning

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).

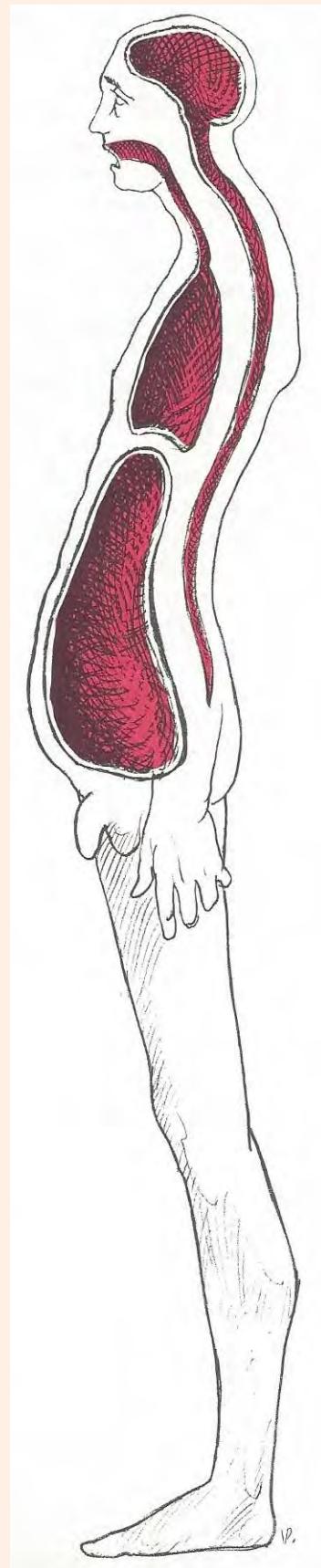
Practical Application

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.

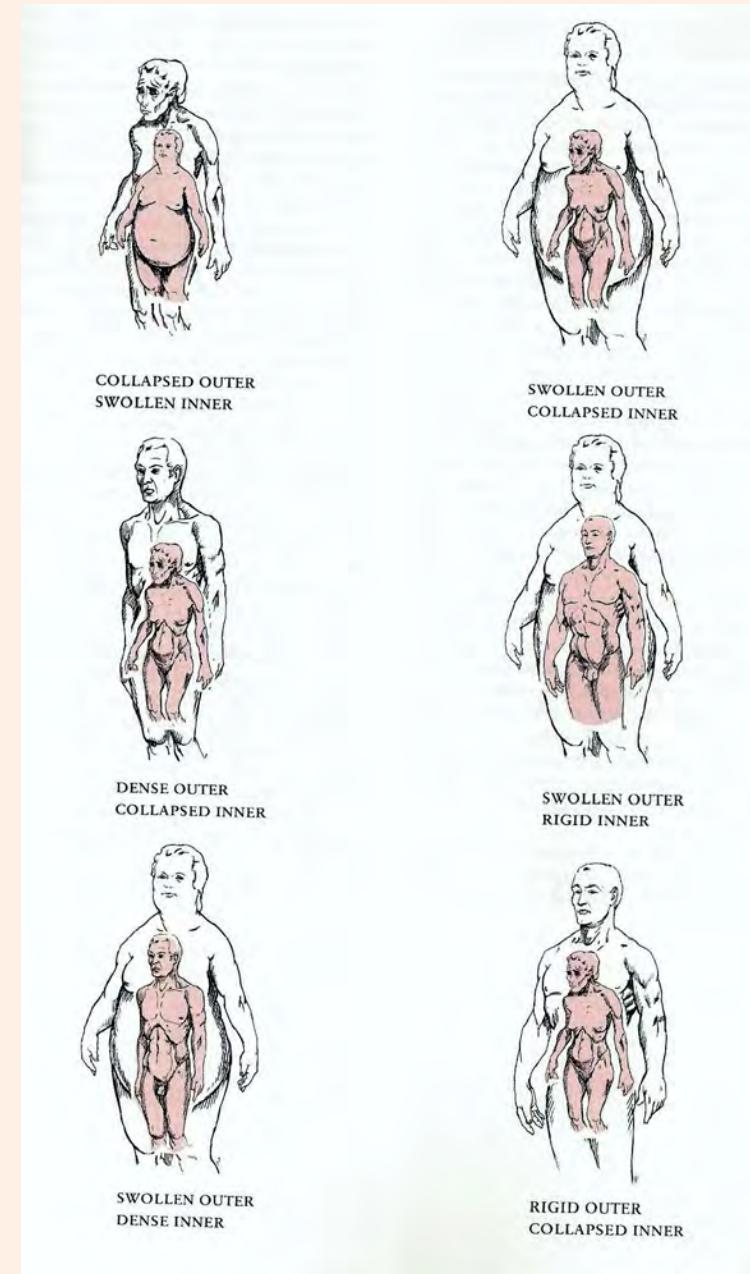


Moreover, there are no borrowings of psychodynamic concepts as is the case with Reich's or Lowen's typologies. Stanley's typology begins from the four phases of the pulsatory continuum: *Motile, porous, rigid, dense*. The key question when working with oneself or with another is: Where in this continuum 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.

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