



A NEW VISION FOR SOMATIC PSYCHOLOGY: Stanley Keleman's Formative Approach

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Formative psychology is based in the evolutionary process in which life continually forms the next series of shapes, from birth through maturity to old age. At conception each person is given a biological and emotional inheritance, but it is through voluntary effort that a human fulfils the potential for forming a personal life. Form gives rise to feeling. When individual identity is grounded in somatic reality, we can say: I know who I am by how I experience myself.

Formative psychology gives a philosophy and method of how to work with our life. We learn to regenerate our emotional and instinctual vitality, to inhabit our body, and to incorporate our excitement and emotional aliveness. The goal of formative practice is to use daily life to practice being present and to create an adult self and reality. I proceed from the premise that we are each conceived as an adult and that we grow the adults we are meant to be.

All of us are in a continual process of forming, stabilising, and reforming our adult reality. This process of forming and reforming is a continuous extension and contraction of tissue motility, a reflex that is an unbroken chain through our life. Pulsation is an essential expression of our hormonal and emotional life. The pulse process, like the heartbeat, is crucial in maintaining our body shape and development. A continuous pulse organises cycles of arousal. When pulsation is inhibited or over-stimulated, our somatic, emotional and mental life also changes.

In the practice of forming, we work with the pulsation patterns of the soma and restore the body's natural rhythm and vitality. The areas of voluntary management in the brain are used and undergo growth.

There is a methodology to formative psychology that I call the Bodying Practice. The Bodying Practice engages the voluntary part of the brain to work with the reflex, non-volitional somatic functions. The brain can suggest patterns of behaviour as well as form an image of its own body to have a relationship with itself. Of first importance is to be bodied, to form one's body in living the stages of our somatic existence.

The Bodying Practice is inaugurated by intensifying whatever we recognise as our present somatic-emotional stance. This intensifying is meant to magnify the pattern of our way of being present along with its images, memories, and thoughts. We can then disorganise what we have voluntarily done and in so doing learn how we can have some say over what we do. This helps bring into relief the reflex or unknown structures that have been inaccessible to us. It is similar to throwing a pebble into the water and initiating rings of response. In this sequence, we become familiar with how we organise our actions and how we can use our brains to affect our responses and feelings. The work of the exercises is to form an adult soma and brain, and an adult emotionality in social relationships.

The work is not only meant to be intimate with past structures and how to disorganise them, but it is also about having a tool for present and future situations.

The exercises are done slowly in frame-by-frame fashion to discover one's own speed and to compensate for somatic anaesthesia - to become intimate with the unforming and forming sensation of the pulse pattern.



To work somatically in this way is to bring about a shift in recognition and to experience the way we organise to be present, to solve problems and to try on the new shapes of expression. It also organises a dialogue between body and brain which shifts the patterns of meaning and order. We begin to live our destiny, our somatic inheritance. We begin to empower ourselves in forming our adult and its relationships.

Formative Methodology: The Bodying Practice

Few people realise that their somatic-emotional presence is a complex organising that is usually unconscious. The formative exercise method is designed to bring into relief and vivify the organising and disorganising sequence of somatic-emotional shapes.

The Bodying Practice is based on the expansion-contraction pulsatory reflex and has five steps:

- What is our somatic situation? Organise the muscular pattern of our organisation.
- Intensify the pattern to make vivid the emotional attitude.
- Undo the intensified emotional-muscular attitude.
- Pause. Contain the pulsatory response.
- Reorganisation of new patterns.

Steps two and three, done voluntarily, make it possible to influence unconscious behaviour. As we practice increasing and decreasing the intensity of muscular emotional shape, we generate specific sensations and feelings. This voluntary practice grows the cortical function to influence reflex responses, making them personal. This dialogue of body and brain grows our personal somatic adult.

The Bodying Practice is a powerful tool to help reorganise past somatic traumas and to help form somatic solutions to problems. However, its most urgent purpose is continue, extend, and reorganise experience to grow a personal somatic identity. For example, it can help identify and then reorganise constraint around the heart allowing a flood of blood warmth that might enable us to love again. It may also use its warmth to personalise a love relationship and deepen bonds.

To be able to influence the intensity of how we respond is no small thing. There is no stereotyped way to do the exercises, no need to perform. What is important is how you learn from doing. I recommend doing the exercises with a slow rhythmic pace. This helps freeze-frame a phase, to hold the form so as to savour the shift in shape and feeling. This is an important experience in self-regulation and identity.

The work is to link the deep pulse process between form and expression so as to deepen the instinctual and personal somatic adult self. The exercises are ways to help us know our somatic-emotional identity and, if we wish, to change our state, to be here differently. This is how problems are truly resolved. The work, then, is a process that aids in establishing a basic somatic adult self that gives us a truer sense of our identity, a somatic sanity and reality.

The Bodying Practice stresses daily life as the practice of forming, bodying the adult self. It is a process of existence, a pulsatory continuum. It invokes a reflex of expanding, gathering, disassembling, regathering, reorganising, growing and forming.

The urge to form is a basic appetite that is the generator of optimism, hope and charity. The ability to commit to this process, using the brain's cortex, gives our life a reference for living and generates satisfaction.