

## The Unforgettable Lessons of Stanley Keleman How to Be Humans by Embodying Our Life instead of Passively Going through It Christina Bogdanova

### Abstract

In this article I present some aspects of Stanley Keleman's work that fascinate me and that have practical and theoretical importance for me. Being pulsatory organisms we can form ourselves and our life; thanks to the pulsation process we organize being in the world and we can moderate how we live. Our bodies are the only true story-tellers of our lives and by feeling and understanding them we can determine our destinies. We, humans, are unique source of self-creating realities. We are voluntary participants in creating consequences and experiences and we can enrich life by making new patterns of acting and new understanding of embodied life. The embodied experience of the organizing process, intrinsic by nature, enables us to turn ourselves into human beings, to develop and grow instead of living in stagnation, dissatisfaction or illness. So, we can consciously choose to undertake the formative journey with its "Five Steps" for better self-understanding of our current state of being, for personal evolution and for forming a sensible living self.

*Keywords:* Stanley Keleman, pulsation, pulsatory organisms, organizing principle, embodied experience, formative journey, Five Steps, the HOW methodology, accordion process, somagram, story-telling

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A couple of years ago I came upon the introduction to a video from the *Emotional Anatomy DVD* by Stanley Keleman. A statement there completely caught my attention. "We are all agents able to influence, to a bigger or lesser degree, how much we can change being in the world, and feel empowered, not simply a victim to forces that come to us." At that time, I had just started to explore in much depth the issue of "victim" and "victimization", and the question of how it is possible to overcome the sense of being a victim and to take back control over your own life was of a great interest to me, both theoretically and practically. So, I listened to all the videos with Stanley Keleman I found on the Internet, and read some of his articles, his landmark book *Emotional Anatomy* and the one that later became one of my favourite practical-oriented books *Embodying Experience: Forming a Personal Life*. For me it was at the same time a challenge, a responsibility and a great pleasure to translate this extraordinary book into Bulgarian for our Institute, which Keleman generously allowed for the sake of the dissemination of pure knowledge.

While doing all of this I realized that I was fascinated by his idea that the human being is the source of self-creating realities, that we are voluntary participants in creating consequences and experiences and enriching life by making new patterns of acting and new understanding

of embodied life. We can learn to treat ourselves properly in order to overcome emotional distress or dissatisfaction, the self-perception of being a victim, illness. We can learn to understand, somatically and cognitively, the ineffective patterns of behaviour in our daily life, and then choose to disassemble them and reorganize new forms of behavioural responses. By doing this we become able to develop and grow instead of living in stagnation. We can influence our personal destiny and not be victims of events, social norms, undesirable or frightful past experiences, inadequate relationships.

He develops the concept of the organizing principle as fundamental to life and by its realization and conscious implementation, we are able to turn ourselves into human beings. Furthermore, this organizing process, because of its intrinsic nature, can be the foundation of one's personal life and personal identity. The embodied experience of this process "here and now" is a kind of guarantee for volitional living based on personal choice and not on fate or other outer circumstances. And in order to facilitate this, Keleman proposes the accordion process and the HOW methodology, which I started to use for myself and my clients. I believe that they are very useful in evoking one's ability to form a personal somatic life, a life of free expression and relevant feelings beyond norms or past experiences.

According to him, the formative journey with its "Five Steps" helps us live with our own "organismic-emotional truth, grace and beauty". The Steps provide a tool for better self-understanding of our current state of being, of personal evolution and of forming a sensible living self. As Keleman puts it:

To work somatically in this way is to bring about a shift in recognition and to experience the way we organize ourselves to be present, to solve problems and to try on the new shapes of expression. It also organizes 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.<sup>1</sup>

And another way to know the formative process is through somagrams – these somatic-emotional images of one's story that reveal our individual or collective sense of existence. Stories help us maintain order, sense, meaning, continuity of organization and form. They reveal the different levels of each event in our life – anatomical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural. By looking at one's own story by the HOW methodology it is possible to understand the organization of one's present structure based on previous experience. Keleman believes that story-telling is "a powerful way to communicate, share, and integrate knowledge and experience as well as a means of creating personal reality". I am really fascinated by how this tool – the somagram – makes people more aware of themselves, and capable of understanding the messages that they are sending out into the world and how they are receiving the demands of others.

I never met Stanley Keleman in person, to my regret. Still, I feel as if I have known him for many years now. His words are simple and enlightening at the same time: they provoke me to think more deeply, to feel more, and to be real and authentic. And that is very close to the theory and psychotherapeutic legacy of Waldo Bernasconi, the founder of the Neo-Reichian analytical body psychotherapy. With his work, Keleman validates each person's right to form him or herself and his or her life. And in Keleman's understanding, all of this

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.centerpress.com/articles/a\\_new\\_vision.html](http://www.centerpress.com/articles/a_new_vision.html)

is not a mental but a physical attitude – he speaks with so much love and respect of “the organism as a structure in the world”.

The most important thing that I have learned from Keleman’s work is the notion that our bodies are the only true story-tellers of our lives and the only people that can determine our destinies are we ourselves. And not because of anything else but because of the fact that we are pulsatory organisms. The pulsation process is the way we organize being in the world and the experience of how we engage others and ourselves and every expression that we make, and it is the means, thanks to which, we can moderate how we live. Leila Cohn has put it excellently in an article where she writes that based on sound theoretical grounds, Keleman presents a whole new psychology of a body’s life, the emotions’ role and man’s search of meaning and how all of this makes out of the human being an embodied subjective process, self-organizing and continually evolving.<sup>2</sup>

### BIOGRAPHY

**Christina Bogdanova** is a psychologist and a Neo-Reichian analytical body psychotherapist. She has also completed a course in Solution Focused approach and studies Art Therapy. She is a full member of the Bulgarian Neo-Reichian Psychotherapeutic Society and of the EABP. Her professional experience is mainly in the field of anxieties and of interpersonal relationships. Christina is the editor of *Look at the Empty Plate. Psychology of Eating* by prof. Zaharina Savova and the translator of *Understanding Your Eating* by prof. Julia Buckroyd. She is co-author of several psychotherapeutic articles.

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<sup>2</sup> Cohn, L. Meeting Stanley Keleman and his Emotional Anatomy. Somatic Psychotherapy Today, Fall 2014, Volume 4, Special Supplement, pp 11-12.