

Forming Your Aging: Porosity and Poetry¹

Introduction to Preface

Marilyn Haller

Stanley's most recent edition of *Essays in Formative Psychology, Forming Your Aging: Porosity and Poetry*, appeared in June, 2018. The intent of this collection is to speak about a time of life he felt was misunderstood and undervalued. For Stanley aging was not simply a decline of what was, but a fresh opportunity to form the next stage in nature's given continuum of living.

Stanley is an author whose subject comes from his lived experience, and speaking from that direct experience gives an authenticity to his particular charismatic style. During the 45 years I have known him, embodiment has been his teacher, his guide and the empowering source of the authority he claims as master of his craft.

Many people have their individual stories of first encountering Stanley, and not infrequently people say they didn't understand a word he said but they resonated with something powerful, some recognition of a profound truth about life. Different stages of living brought particular emphases and truths to the fore, but over the years Stanley was unwavering in his commitment to his central theme: Understanding and addressing how human beings form themselves.

As Stanley said early on, the body speaks its mind. And learning its language was a continuing challenge he took very seriously. Diligently and courageously, he wrestled with translating his experiences and insights into an expressive language. In that process and over the years, he created a descriptive somatic vocabulary. He was deliberate in his use of language and careful not to cross over into psychological or medical terminology that did not fit his formative vision.

As Stanley accumulated years, his interest in subjectivity and self-intimacy, maturity and aging gave him a freedom of expression that fit his desire for soaring inward. He was especially pleased that this recent book of essays illustrates the creative possibilities of the older body in its season of innate and increasing porosity — a body time of softening boundaries with more ebb and flow of time and experience. He enjoyed swimming in his sea of subjectivity, sometimes diving deep, often returning with new creative expressions that made his blue eyes twinkle.

In this preface, Stanley revisits his early biological vision and the trajectory of developing Formative Psychology®. I think he would also be very pleased with this opportunity to share his discoveries in this edition of the journal.

Marilyn Haller, Fall 2018

Preface

Stanley Keleman

The ability to remember, reassemble, edit and rebody experience is at the heart of growing a new dimensionality of human experience and embodying its values. Each person's lived anatomic history is the narrative of forming the different somatic shapes of their embodied existence. Voluntary participation in the body's forming process is the tool to investigate and develop the world we are, and the one we are forming even when we cannot know for sure what the outcome will be.

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From the earliest days of my professional work I sought an image of mankind upon which to base my own life. Having trained in both the healing sciences and athletics, I looked to understand the body as the basis of our existence and satisfaction. Whether the mind dominated the body or the body dominated the mind, a popular debate of the time, did not fit for me. Nor could I accept any attempt to reduce humans to a materialistic event or other metaphysical and idealistic notions of the body. This dissatisfaction eventually led to the idea that experience itself would inform the conception I needed. Just as Einstein was required to reject the language of Newton, I thought, so must I reject both the mechanistic and spiritualistic languages concerning the body and seek to develop a vision and a cosmology from actual experience of living.

Taking epistemology as a functional guide and using my own experience as a reference I began to realize I was both one body and many bodies. Different life situations required similar yet different responses and behaviors. I was living both a prepersonal biological inheritance and a particular individual style. I lived a professional life, a family life and an artist's life. I was a social person and a private subjective person. Experiencing myself as this multiplicity I realized I was continually organizing myself bodily to act in different situations and thereby creating the shape and form of my life. I was an embodied biological process capable of organizing a chain of experiences called me. It was then I realized I was involved with the mystery of making a body with multiple dimensions of action, feeling and possibility.

I had learned from my friend and mentor Nina Bull (1880-1968), founder of the Attitudinal Theory of Emotion, to pay attention to the relationship of the act of doing something and the associated emotional and feeling states. How I was organizing myself seemed to be an ongoing interactive conversation between the body's inherited responses and the cortex's ability for voluntary choice and novel creation. Nina's original research was discovering that instinctual anatomical movement patterns give rise to emotion and feeling, not the other way around. In the 1950's, this scientific discovery was very counterintuitive, and it led me to a next step, which was understanding that delaying the trajectory of an action in progress not only vivifies experience, it also creates a pause place, a state of muscular-neural dynamic tension, and this organismic state is where choice and possibility reside. Experientially and conceptually I found these discoveries sensational.

Over time these and other anatomical concepts became the foundation of my investigations. In brief they are understanding that (1) the body organizes present acts from remembered motoric expressions, (2) muscle and brain/cortex converse in a sentient pulsatory language of the body speaking with itself about forming itself, and (3) the body's innate forming process is a dynamic morphological continuum of anatomical shaping, with phases of instability and stability. These discoveries from lived experience became the basis of a cosmology that, for me, is at the very heart of understanding the formative language of living and also has practical application for anyone seeking to engage in self-forming.

Building upon these insights, I was led to the notion of a formative biological process grounded in human anatomy. Seen outwardly, it is the development of the different bodies we are in our lifetime; inwardly it is the unseen dimensions and interweavings of our subjective life. Biological forming, involuntary and voluntary, is the process we are, and it is manifested as all the bodied events and experiences that make up our lives.

The concept of the human as a formative biological process seeking completion and

satisfaction filled me with an awe and respect for the sacredness of how life forms. I was no longer bothered by arguments for a body/mind split or other ideological and spiritual notions. I felt free to explore how a person forms themselves and their experience by their life activity, their language, feeling, emotion, desires and images. I wanted to know what kind of life body a person was trying to shape, what was being communicated in their actions and expressions. I looked for what a person was trying to develop, how desire sought satisfaction, how action became feeling or thought.

In the course of my work I recognized that the soma is more plastic and malleable than we had been taught to believe, and the human is capable of many reorganizing. At the same time, I was struck by the fact that life is situational. We live in a sea of continually altering situations, and our soma is challenged with changing internal and external realities that require both responsiveness and constancy. Helping people learn to participate in the body's formative process and to voluntarily influence their experience, became a quantifiable ritual that offers choices and the learned ability for being and acting in ways that are not programmed. This becomes a way to be the artist and the poet of your own life.

I have spent more than five decades developing a language and a methodology that encourages the growth of this kind of individual — procedures that honor the ancient, deep biological experience we share, and encourage an individual style of personalizing that inheritance.

Early on I called these procedures *The How Exercise*. This has evolved into *The Bodying Practice*:

1. Notice what is and give your experience a muscular shape.
2. Slowly differentiate your shape by increasing and decreasing its muscular pressure or intensity.
3. Pause. Wait for sensations and feelings to inform you.
4. Practice. Repeat Steps 1-3 to stabilize and solidify tissue memory.
5. Take new form into your world.

The intentional action by which a person engages these steps I call *voluntary muscular-cortical effort* (VMCE). VMCE is a nonverbal sentient conversation between muscle and cortex that opens the door to the inner anatomic landscape of the body's multi-dimensional, pulsatory malleability with its many-layered, inclusive dimensions of morphing shapes, expressions and felt meanings of the universe we are and the one we live in.

As biological organisms we are an inherited, prepersonal, living process of continually changing structure and experience. As human beings we can be participants in forming our personal life shapes, our values and satisfactions, from young to mature and through all the stages of aging and even into our dying. Each person has their inherited biological destiny and the ability to influence, to a degree, that destiny.

There is a special kind of empowerment that comes from learning the skills of self-forming, it is a force that creates meaning and deepens satisfaction. Living my own aging and continuing to apply the principles of self-forming continues to engage and surprise me. In myself and in my work, in small ordinary ways and sometimes dramatic ways, I witness the formative approach generating experiences that birth the optimism of a future yet to be formed. These formative principles of learning from one's own experience are perhaps even more relevant and urgent in our contemporary society where few guidelines are established for living one's later life. This collection of writing is the upwelling of my experiences — and forming them — as I continue charting my own new territory.

MARILYN HALLER, STANLEY KELEMAN

The poet's vibrato arises from the
eternal humming, undulating, droning
of the body's osmotic world where
swarms of pulsatory travelers
swim across the synaptic seas.

Permeating unending existence
with a new song of life means
giving body to our personal poem.
This mystery of giving and receiving
is what wants to be formed.

The poet is the voice of
the organizing process of
inherited and personal life.

It speaks as a motile wind
both gentle and growling, intense
hot and cool singing, chanting
bathing, penetrating resonating me.



Reviewed by Phil Seab

I still am giving birth, still hungry to say good morning to another day of my body's arising to give shape to my own horizon.

Keleman, *Forming Your Aging*, 2018

Stanley was an explorer of our interior landscapes and a singer of songs and writer of books and poems. He spoke of his inner porous arousal generating feelings of fullness and a satisfying happiness in experiencing the generosity of being alive. He filled his days with songs of life by giving body to his personal somatic poem.

Forming Your Aging: Porosity and Poetry, was published by Stanley when he was 86. He wrote the words in the last years of his life, but he had been working on this book for a long time. He says he spent more than five decades developing a language and a methodology for growing an individual who is the artist and the poet of their own life. His methodology, like our body cells, is a process which itself embodies growth and evolution through self-learning and self-forming. Stanley says that as we acquire years in every season of our bodied life we gather our expressions, feelings, and images to develop a personal fleshed space-time dimension within our body. Becoming older is a formative process and we are either forming ourselves or being formed.

Stanley embodied and lived what he writes about in *Forming Your Aging*. In his seminars and papers and in conversations with him he expressed his formative perspective on any subject he discussed. Voluntary self-influence is self-empowerment that forms a new identity based on lived experience and growing new functions from our body's pulsatory experiences. Stanley used formative language and frequently reminded people to describe their experiences and thoughts with words that supported what was present in them and allowed a formative process to grow from that. He encouraged each person to use a formative perspective to create meaning, satisfaction and optimism for themselves.

In *Forming Your Aging* Stanley explains that our body has an under bodied cortical neural map, a shadow body, and that the metamorphosis of the under formed shadow body arises in the older body as a porosity and malleability that wants to be recognized by our cortex. Stanley stressed the importance of practice for both cortical and somatic memory to be embodied and used in a resilient way. He evolved his earlier steps of *The How Exercise* into the steps of *The Bodying Practice* for using voluntary muscular-cortical effort (VMCE) for self-learning and self-forming. He set these out in the Preface to his book which is included in a separate article of this issue.

These steps describe an embodied conversation between muscle and cortex. The self is a remembered, morphological journey from conception to death, from our birth to the end of our personal embodied time. How one engages these steps evolves with aging. With aging, the forceful quick expressions of youth shift to a slower arousal and response time that reorganizes one's identity and values. *The Bodying Practice* is an intra-somatic dialogue of possibilities for understanding and influencing behavior. By working formatively with our behaviors like shrinking, rigidifying, squeezing, or forming porosity, we can influence our intentions and emotional associations. *Forming Your Aging* is Stanley's prose and poetry about his deeply felt sentient experience of living this process, and practical suggestions for those of us who are in our late life.

Stanley says that re-forming and rebodilying are still the tasks of late life as they are during the alpha stage of adulthood. In late life our bodily appearance and structure changes to be softer and

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more porous. Our memories are tissue maps within our bodies, places of bodying and rebodying again and again. These cycles of aliveness are the embodiment of a personal self-knowing process and the forming of our identity. Late life porosity is a time of gathering information and editing intensities and intents of our formative possibilities. Sometimes the uncertainties of getting older may be disturbing, but working with them we find that they are a kind of softening, a porosity and slowness that brings a different satisfaction to our life.

In his book Stanley writes that the challenge of late life aging is to develop voluntary skills to form somatic structures that add to and support the body's more porous and poetic somatic expressions. Skills that we can influence and live. Using voluntary effort, voluntary differentiation gives us a way to respond to and influence our emerging porous structures to form a later adult shape using our experiences that have a feeling of personal truth. The process the organism uses to make its personal shape alters its destiny.

The formative biosphere creates bodies with an embodying process from which grows the self-forming adult, which is the evolution of the human as a rebodying organism. The human adult in all its life stages is the personalization of life's formative process in its life seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter. Being intimate with oneself is a life-long formative journey that offers the gift of forming a personal life that personalizes the inherited pre-personal and influences the socially learned.

Stanley lists 14 statements, embodying truths, in his chapter on "The Wonder of Body Shapes Appearing and Disappearing". These are truths about the many individual body shapes of our own life, and for our memories of those who are no longer with us. Four of them are:

- Body shapes changing is a wonder and a narrative of each individual's life story.
- An ending of bodily appearing is also anticipation of an unknown appearing.
- Endings contain the desire to participate in the continuity of experiencing.
- What has ended still has a presence in the collective embodied memory.

For Stanley, living with somatic emotional embodying truths acknowledges the privilege, deepens the gratitude and sweetens the experience of being alive. He says voluntary muscular-cortical effort helped him contain his inner waves of porous arousal and generate feelings of a satisfying happiness.

At his last seminar in July he was full of the aliveness and porous tenderness he describes as part of the evolution and embodiment of his late adult. He taught as much by his presence as by his words. His book mixes poetry and practical advice. His poetry, some of it in prose form, sometimes sounds like abstract thoughts, but is actually descriptions of his deep experiences of his interior life. He could return easily to those places he called his interior landscape because of his many journeys there using his bodying practice. He often said his interest was not to give answers, but to empower others to find their own answers grounded in the truth of their own form and experience. One of the poetic beauties of a self-empowered embodied aliveness is its ability to be passed on to others and to the next generation. I see this in my children and now in my children's children, like ripples in a pond growing ever wider in time and space. I learned from Stanley how to also continue these ripples in my personal time of my late adult life into my last days.

BIOGRAPHY

Phil Seab is a retired clinical neurologist living in San Francisco. He was privileged to know Stanley since 1970. He received his M.D. from The University of Texas Medical School in Dallas, Texas.

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