

Growing a Personal Form

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Abstract

Using voluntary muscular effort to influence inherited behaviors is a way to grow a personal somatic life. Giving body to these behavioral shapes is a new moment of existence. The active participation in our embodied existence generates joy, satisfaction, optimism, love and meaning for our lives.

Keywords

Voluntary Muscular Effort – Growth – Personal Form – Meaning

On the transition to the seventh decade of my life, in a post-menopausal tone, I chose the pyramid exercise that Stanley Keleman taught at the “Retreat for Somatic Practice” in San Rafael, California, in Autumn, 2005, as one of my regular exercises. In doing so, I initiated a developmental process. This developmental process embraces the voluntary muscular-cortical effort of intensity and duration and the reaction from the involuntary. It also includes my relationship to myself and to others, as well as my set of behavioral attitudes.

The Exercise

Form – Voluntary Muscular Effort – Intensity – Duration

I form with my hands a pyramid by putting my fingertips together. The outer sides of my hands form the sides of the pyramid. With voluntary muscular-cortical effort I begin gradients of pressure from outside in, compressing the inner space. In three steps of increasing intensity, I build a container that on the highest level is a firm capsule. Then, what happens in the hands also happens in the body wall. I create a boundary and a frontier between myself and the world. I form an enclosed space first in the hands and then in the whole organism. Holding the form in at specific level of intensity brings a gathering response into the pattern.

I start doing the exercise sitting down then standing, which brings the whole torso, chest, abdomen, pelvis and legs into the pattern. The sides of the torso and the legs form the sides of the pyramid. Then, I form the pyramid in my head.

As Stanley teaches, I am differentiating inherited patterns through voluntary muscular-cortical effort by forming layers in the structure of my body wall and by creating new synaptic connections in my cortex. The central factor in stimulating the forming of a new synapse is the stimulation of organismic attention. I need a challenge of something new, an inner asymmetry or something unexpected.

Voluntary muscular-cortical effort should, therefore, have markers that are based on experience and that can be identified by the cortex, markers to which the organism reacts with attentiveness. Stanley uses two markers, one for the intensity of the effort and one for the duration. Distinct, measured intensity and duration of voluntary muscular-cortical effort is the stimulus for growing new synapses or strengthening them.

The markers of my intensity—minimum, medium and maximum—give me an orientation for my efforts. As soon as I voluntarily do a step up or down the ladder of intensity, my orientation gets difficult and becomes diffuse. Therefore, inside the layers of intensity I create small edges of rigidity. Quite apart from the fact that every edge is a shape by itself, making an edge is an additional help for me in regulating the intensity. Through repetition over time, my orientation becomes more sure and confident.

Building up the intensity of the effort in the first round of the exercise and then holding it, I experience myself like cutting paths into a thicket with a machete: “Thwack, thwack.” With every stroke I assemble a group of muscles into the pattern. After a while, the paths are weeded and they become as easy to walk as streets. The experience starting my effort (local), of getting support from cortical activity (central) and then mobilizing the whole organism into the pattern (general) becomes stronger. The assembling phase in the specific level of intensity reaches a moment when there is an experience of fulfillment. It is like a coming home inside this form. It does not matter what form it is; it may be an unpleasant one but the experience of fulfillment still generates pleasure and satisfaction.

When I go down the ladder of intensity, my inside starts pressuring back; my brain starts swelling and my sight gets clearer and three-dimensional. The pictures on the wall in my office develop a depth. The pressure from the inside out can become so strong that it threatens to destabilize the outer container, so I create an edge of rigidity inside. The outside may involuntarily push back from outside to inside. I recognize that it is a pulse. If I now create layers in the pulse by using voluntary muscular-cortical effort, I experience a delightful dance of changing shapes.

For the duration of the effort, I create a marker by silently counting for 10 seconds. For me, counting is a big help in holding a specific level of intensity. Before using the marker of counting, I held a specific level until I experienced a reaction or until I recognized signals of being tired. When I have the impulse to give up or begin questioning myself, “What is this good for?” “What am I doing here?,” counting makes a form that is a good support for me.

Over time, the silent counting helps build a structure inside myself—it starts with a swelling in my head, throat, back of my neck and upper chest—I create an inner space. Lastly, I have the impression that the counting is gliding down and that I am counting with my throat. The structure of attention in the cortex is supported.

In the course of doing the pyramid exercise, I become clearer about the relationship between my inherited and my learned structures and the influence of my hormonal situation. For example, I want to do the exercise in the “right” way. I stiffen my neck. I am looking for the “right” attitude, I confuse myself; I bring my legs together, bend my knees a little bit, shrink myself and get

smaller. My inherited porous structure, plus the porosity of the post-menopausal years, result in a permanent struggle to hold a specific intensity. My constitutional layers have a conflictual dialogue with each other. The dialogue from my endomorph to my mesomorph is, "Support me!" From my mesomorph to my endomorph it's, "Be quicker, react quicker, I want to act!" and from my ectomorph to my endomorph and my mesomorph is, "Too much information from your dialogue. I cannot take so much."

The exercise fuels excitement. Sometimes I perceive this excitement only long after I finish exercising. When this happens, I must give a lot of attention to keeping my container intact in the course of the day. I have to become familiar with this growing intensity of feelings and sensations. Stanley: *"Familiarity is a process."*

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By stepping up the intensity of the effort and then disorganizing, I am connecting inside myself and making an inner surface. I give the inside edge more rigidity and I start differentiating the inside surface. I start pushing the inside out. There is some exteriorization at the surface and I support it. When I support the structure of exteriorizing, it gives me an experience of "I am occupying my world, I am making a shape for myself." Stanley: *"We are in the early stages of 'my world.'"* To be in the world with a shape for myself, is the personalization of an instinctual act: "I" am sitting down, "I" am walking, etc.

Doing the exercise standing and forming the pyramid with my whole body generates a strong thrust of vitality. At the highest level of intensity, there is the experience of: "Strange"—"I am strange in this world"—"What am I doing here?"—"I am strange and this world is strange for me." Stanley: *"Separateness gives a certain amount of loneliness and strangeness."*

When I repeat this form, everyday situations appear strange to me. I feel separate and at the same time connected. It was an experience with which I had to become familiar and practice with my family and people close to me. This form is connected with a clear perception of how I react to other people and how I am regulating my outer wall. It is a source of pleasure and satisfaction to have a world of my own. At the same time, the question shows up, "How do I want to be in relationships?" This is the question for layers in this separateness.

Each time I do the pyramid exercise, each set of experiences gives me a different way of being in the world. I am building a library of shapes of being in the world. Each shape is another moment of a shape of existence. I am constructing the world piece by piece.

In the next weeks a paradox shows up: I am a separate world and I am inside this world. At the same time the outer world and the inner world are not different from each other. It is this outer membrane that creates my world, giving me the chance to form an inner personal world. This separateness also creates a desire for participate in the outer world. I realize that "belonging" has to be created. I want to cultivate this stranger and her interest in the world in which she lives.

After some weeks of exercising, I answer myself with a dream. After having worked with Stanley on this dream at the dream workshop in Solingen, I understand now that the emergence of this dream was a call of my inner tube for cortical assistance. In the dream, I hear somebody call my name. If I form, without speaking my name, and organize different intensities, I experience an inner tube, an inner surface that I can stabilize and differentiate with my efforts.

It is a call for the form of the "sovereign of my world" in this phase of my life to come into existence. This form gives me the experience of: "I am here—I form my world—I am in charge." At the same time, I experience a deeper, slower pulse that embraces the pulse of my heart and breathing. It is an experience of timelessness, of eternity.

The effects of my use of voluntary muscular-cortical effort to work with the pyramid exercise are that I am much more vital. Contact to others is less tiring for me, and I make contact more directly. Connections with others give me more pleasure and satisfaction. There is less wish or need to retreat and be by myself. I am separate and by myself even if I am with others. I recognize when I am tired. I have developed a stronger sense for the phases of my forming process. My slow moving inner pulse is more an experience of being at home than something that has to be accelerated. These effects come from a deeper level, not from the periphery. Now, I understand more deeply the personalisation of behavior; how voluntary muscular-cortical effort calls up the involuntary reaction and how, in regulating and influencing this involuntary reaction, I create something that has not existed before. Being separate and forming connections inside and outside of me seems to be the foundation of the joy of living. The key to everything is the forming of a container.

I am knitting, knitting a web of connections inside and outside of myself. This web is elastic and pulsing; it connects all parts of me and it connects me with the outer world and the universe. It connects me with those who were here before me and it connects me with those who will still be here, when I go home, and with those in whom I will be alive. Through bodying the shapes of my existence and co-bodying, I create meaning for my life. This active knitting of connections fills me with the joy of life; it gives me satisfaction and optimism. I am looking forward to the coming decade of my life.

Writing this down I am being moved by thick, warm waves of love and gratitude.

Biography

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