

# The Human Story: Forming a Personal World

Stanley Keleman

## Abstract

Our bodies are formed by a universal inherited process of shape-making that generates and organizes its own information. Human subjectivity is the experience of our interior anatomic structure. The ability to influence inherited behaviors is how we grow a personal somatic life. Using voluntary effort to influence our shape is a way to have some freedom in choosing how we live our embodied destiny.

## Keywords

Voluntary Muscular Effort – Somatic Self Knowing – Personalizing Our Embodiment

From a Formative view, something is always ending, beginning, blooming and fading in us. Cycles of birthing, maturing, deepening, aging and dying are processes that go on all our lives. From conception, we are continually bathed in prepersonal processes, the inherited programs for forming our bodies. Our task as humans is to individualize and personalize coming into being, blooming and fading at the various stages of our bodied existence.

With practice, we can learn to have some influence in our inherited process. This ability to influence inherited behaviors is how we grow a personal somatic life. As we share with others the forming and reorganizing of the personal world, we shed light into the prepersonal unknown.

The simple yet complex truth of the universal Formative process is that shapes fade and new shapes appear. This basic life process of changing shapes is the ground floor for understanding how our world is perpetuated and differentiated, how it begins and ends. The growing and changing of our individual somatic shape is how all of us live the universal process of coming into being and fading away. The gift of the human cortex, the center of creativity and intentional action, makes it possible for us to learn to participate in the changing of our somatic shapes; in the blooming and fading of our individual lives. Using voluntary effort to influence shape, emotion and thinking, enables us to form a personal life and a personal world.

The inherited human body is a prepersonal organization that is formed from the interior of the biosphere. The biosphere has patterns of excitement that become organized into anatomic structures. Our body develops as a series of processes that include the ability for self-reflection and self-influence. We can learn to identify and recreate, muscularly, a body shape or pattern. Then begin to differentiate and influence our shape by making variations in the intensity and duration of this muscular pattern.

The cell membrane, as a primary boundary that defines an inside and an outside, is the analog of how our body makes boundaries—boundaries that are capable of creating multiple layers of differentiation. We can learn to use voluntary effort to vivify inside and outside surfaces. We learn to make boundaries by incrementally increasing and decreasing the muscular intensity of a body shape. This ability to differentiate body shape and patterns of behavior enables us to grow a personal adult—with our own feelings and thoughts, our own intuitive notions, our own rationality and poetic fabrications of ourselves and the world. The greater the differentiation of shape, the greater the choice for variation in behavior.

Czeslaw Milosz, the Nobel Laureate poet, was interested in writing about the experiences of the fading of our existence. He wrote that all that is necessary to justify existence is to describe existence. I would take that further; I would say it is worthwhile to participate in forming our existence. To be engaged in the forming of our experience, the changing of our somatic and emotional shape, to grow and manage a personal world and to articulate our experience in words or expressions—all these require voluntary effort. This effort is more than description—it is somatic behavior.

Self-influence through voluntary effort opens the door to our generative and imaginative interior. Our body is the theatre where we form characters with their own sensorial and logical facts and their own motoric, intuitive, poetic experiences. This internal dimension expands the world inside our skin, and supports the inventing and reshaping of behavior, feeling and meaning. Over time, using voluntary effort, we can build a personal internal anatomic architecture. We experience this personal anatomic architecture as an internal dimension of human knowing. By forming our somatic interior, we do as D.H. Lawrence urges: We build our ship of death to carry us to the other side. When we do this, we personalize our life and death.

The hero of Saul Bellow's novel, *Ravelstein*, speaks of a man who felt instinctively that everyone has an embodied destiny, a destiny that takes effort to live. This embodied destiny—the soma's cycles of expansion and contraction, blooming and fading that form the essential plot of the human story, can be influenced by voluntary effort. Most Americans, Bellow points out, want to cut loose from the social mooring of birth to create a new image of themselves, an image of their own devising. Phillip Roth speaks of the human urge to form an alternative destiny that repudiates the past and persuades us toward a new interiority. These statements are, to my mind, insights into how we, as living organisms form, govern, and invent our lives. When we learn to participate with the universal Formative process, we can have an individual voice that influences our growing, maturing and dying.

Our life, as William Shakespeare said, "is a play within a play." The inherited body and the personally formed body are the play within the play that everyone lives. The inherited adult and the voluntarily formed adult—each a distinct presence in the world—play their parts in the narrative of embodied existence. We are all individual and collective subjects engaged in forming a human world of shared concerns for living and dying.