

Stanley Keleman: The Mystery of Embodiment Talk - Meridian University Dec 2011

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The Formative Approach to Human Development by Stanley Keleman

I think the best way to start would be just to tell a little story first:

I was in London being the keynote speaker at the osteopathic society about four years ago and one of the questions that kept coming up was: "How come many people feel good in the office and when they leave the office and come back a few days later, they said they felt better but then their symptoms come back or they feel ill that it has reinstated itself? How is that possible?"

You have to remember that anatomy is behavior and that anatomy takes time to reorganize itself and make itself stable. If you do something to a client and they feel better, that doesn't actually mean that they have been voluntarily involved in the changes. You need to understand how you involve the person in the changes that have been precipitated. Changing the anatomy requires the person to participate, otherwise they are trusting a process which they don't have any influence over.

The reason I tell this story is because it tells the difference between being bodied and being embodied.

Bodied is to have the gift of having a body that has been formed somewhat automatically and genetically or through society and being embodied is when the organism participates in its own changes and has developed voluntary effort to facilitate the morphogenesis, the change in their body shape, behavior and experiences.

In one situation, we are bodied and we learn about our body and we learn to be aware of our bodies. The other situation, where we have an embodied life, is where we form our behavior, influence our changing shapes during our life and build a personal anatomic reality.

Sensory awareness does not really set the stage for how the body functions. It's motoric action first. The body acts and in its action it has learned to sense itself. Working in a somatic way, the way I do with voluntary muscular effort, which is a process that develops over time, creates motoric awareness.

Knowing how you are acting, knowing the steps in how you organize learning to act and how you repeat the action.

Maybe a good way would be for me to read a page and a half that I've written which

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would make a clear statement from which we could ask questions from:

Experiencing and being aware of our body does not constitute an embodied life. The body's forming process creates and is at the heart of animate existence. That is the forming processes. The body lives its continuous morphogenesis, a continuous change in its shape over time. It learns to use muscular effort, voluntary muscular effort, to differentiate its inherited patterns, its intensities or its overwhelming expressions or underwhelming expressions, so that it's not a victim to its own processes.

The body life which is a continual change, learns how to use this muscular effort and to be able to repeat making a memory structure of its efforts that allows it a personal existence rather than an inherited existence. It is the way we create personal meaning and social meaning.

VME facilitates excitatory patterns, gives them a body shape by creating synaptic junctions in muscular patterns and influences the ability for the organism to transcend its own inherited behavior. That means that it doesn't fall into old reflex patterns, but forms new motor patterns which is what being embodied means: Being able to create a body for yourself during your lifetime.

It's a formative process. And this demands how to learn to affect our inherited behavior like how you want to scream or hit out or reach out or be tender. This is a continuing education. This goes on through all our life if we are willing to make sure that we could be in a life situation of danger or of tenderness, of love or of challenge in a way that we could use ourselves to manage a situation rather than be managed by a situation. It represents a way of being in the world.

The organism in its inherited coming into the world is a life field-- meaning it generates its excitement and it generates connections, but using voluntary effort you create a personal life field, a field in which you make the connections over time with people, you differentiate it and you deepen it and you create an anatomical entity that has a life of its own which tells you that I have embodied my experiences, given it body, form -- I have made a gestalt of living that I am able to do things on my own. I can be empowered and that is my embodied life. I create a subjectivity.

So the bottom line in voluntary effort and understanding that we are a forming process is that it empowers us to be able to make changes in our life and to manage our own excitement so that it becomes a personal way of being excited and expressing it. It is a "can do" life and it is a life that says "I have lived and I have made a life".

That is the difference between being bodied and being embodied.

Response to John's commentary:

Basically, we are not taught how to access the body's natural forming process. People

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of good will have been acting as helpers for a long time, but how our own forming process becomes a teacher to our own cortex so that we could be voluntarily involved and influence our own bodying process, our own expressive process, allows us a formative view of life rather than an accommodating view.

This is an evolutionary process. This is a process about how one forms or creates a developmental lifestyle for themselves rather than a reactive lifestyle. You have to say that the forming process is a way of thinking, a way of feeling, a way of managing one's behavior. It's voluntary self forming rather than autonomic or social self forming. And that way it is a statement about being embodied -- that is giving body to our experiences and responses, knowing how to give it shape using voluntary effort in all the major events in our life gives us a life where we feel that we are not victims to our own processes which need management or from other people trying to form us.

Response to John's comment---

It is more than being in the body, it is actually forming the body, differentiating our responses. It is more than experiencing because experiencing, which is important, doesn't really allow you to develop the tools of how you generated the experience.

What I'm introducing is that the organism as an action organ actually is creating its behavior. It's creating its experiencing and it is giving shape to it so that it is a personalized response to situations.

And this is the most important part -- we think that the world determines how we will respond so we have been taught how to be responsive to the world around us. But I think that there has been an evolutionary shift where the organism is now using itself as its own nature and it's relating to how it is differentiating its own responses, how it differentiates its excitement, its reaching out, its holding itself close and you see that very clearly when you work with dreams when somebody tells you there dream in formative psychology then you say, "Show me the figures in the dream". "Make a muscular model of the figure in the dream" and in that way you take the body that has been dreaming about itself using the figures of the dream to re-embody its own process, gives then a deepening relationship of the body to itself and to the animate field of being alive.

That is, the body as a life field has a very big interest in keeping the life field vital and intact and alive. But it tries to avoid being overwhelmed.

Response to John's comments about emotions and body---

The ability to get at our feeling life is a very important step. What we need to now

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understand is how the body is capable of influencing its own shape, its own way of being in the world -- like one could be contracted and reserved or one could be with poor boundaries and being unable to contain itself. How one learns muscularly to make a boundary or to not be so rigid deeply affects the kinds of feelings that we have. We don't become victim to our feelings. We learn that the organism generates a feeling in a way that it tells itself about how its acting or the action that it wants to make to be in the world or to be with one's self.

I just keep coming back to being embodied is a voluntary effort. The development of voluntary effort which is a cortical and subcortical integration of behavior creates a life, a personal life -- is what people want to call "consciousness" or "awareness".

Response to John's comment about choices

This takes voluntary muscular effort to do. To be embodied means to generate experience and excitement and to give it body, means to let it grow connections within the body and also to learn how to organize specific expressions that communicate how we want to reach out or how we want to receive and how we relate to ourselves in the life cycle of our own changing shape.

We go from being babies to adults and then older adults and aging adults and these are shape changes. They are emotional changes coming from the way our body shape has changed. We body ourselves differently in all these transitions and the more that we influence how we go from child to adolescent to adult to mature adult and to an aging adult gives us a power of shaping a life, living a life and having an internal structure that we can communicate to others about how they may embody themselves by learning and sharing with how we have embodied ourselves.

But this is really a major evolutionary change and that having an embodied life implies more than being bodied. It means forming one's body.

John's question: Which of your writings is the most accessible intro to your work?

"Insults to Form" would be the general outline to the different body organizations and the different feeling states that arise from these shapes, how to deal with stress.

The famous one all over the world is "Emotional Anatomy" and its companion book "Embodied Experience".

.....continue to speak about books and website

A message that I would say...

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The degree to which a person is able to participate in changing their anatomical shape, they develop memory structures or a kind of subjectivity about what their life means to them and how their life is a self generating fountain not only of excitement and images but of values about how to be in the world and what it means to experience, how they form experiencing in every stage of their life. They are not completely autonoton, a machine. That is what I would say would be the bottom line: Every person is a flower and they have to grow that flower.

How we go from one form to another form. This is the central mystery of existence -- how we change shape, how we have changed from child to adult and what lessons of change are in that developmental process that lead us to be able to manage crisis's of our own growth and development or situations in the world that require special responses that are not programmed.

The great mystery for human existence is how the organism creates possibilities to change its anatomical shape and behavior to meet circumstances while unprogrammed. That is an individual life and that's the life of freedom.

This makes working somatically, not only the correction of trauma, but it offers the possibility to form a life because you now learn how to manage yourself.

Being embodied is being able to influence yourself to form expressions that become part of your memory system that can be repeated and bring about an individual life and not simply the correction of something.

We have to make a difference between being traumatized and learning how to meet the challenges of our own changing shapes which are given to us at birth. When we are conceived we have the possibility to form an individual shape of our existence and that I think represents a whole other way of looking at the human structure -- as a possibility of having an embodied life.

Response to John's comments:

A person who has contact with their own life field, with their own somatic truth -- I think that person is a kind person and that person is not an evil person. That is a person who is facilitating life rather than trying to only correct situations.

I give quite a bit of attention to Nina Bull and her great discoveries --- attitude theory of emotions. She definitely was wonderful pioneering spirit. Her basic precept was that the body is the language of motor activity and that people should know that. And that motor activity generates feeling and motor activity generates thought. She is a resource for

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people to pay attention to.

Could you describe a typical session with you at this time of your work?

When I interview a person when we are meeting face to face, whether it is in a group or a private session, I am interested in not only the postural configuration that the person is presenting -- whether they are slumped over, stiff, pulled back, whether they know it or not are in a particular inherited pattern of reflex like being withdrawn, being reserved or being puffed up or pulled up

And then I'm interested in just listening to them talk and tell me about their situation. I'm interested in their tissue state -- whether I see it's underformed or whether its puffy, or whether its thick and dense -- because there are four stages of changes in the body. And then I am paying a lot of attention to the whole gestural configuration by which a person is explaining or defining their situation -- how they use their arms, their hands, how their body turns, how they pull back, what their breathing pattern is like.

And then I would call attention to how they are using their upper body and their hands. Are they always making restrained movements that are close to the body or whether they are extending themselves almost past their own body boundary line? And ask them whether they could slow that down and begin to recognize the kind of tension patterns that are part and parcel of their gesture or how they are being present in the world. And how they organize different levels of intensity to that tension. And could they increase that muscular tension voluntarily and then decrease the tension so that they can alter the intensity and the duration of the motor activity and then get feedback from themselves about how they are organizing their gesture, how they manage their excitement, how they are trying to articulate their different feeling states.

And then I would ask them : "Could you make a story about that? What is reaching out like for you? How did you learn to reach out or if you change how you are reaching out how does it affect your feeling and your thought? And in that way we begin to get a way that the person sees how they generate experiences involuntary, how they influence their involuntary experiences voluntarily, and then how they experience the kind of feedback both emotionally and cognitively which gives them a whole other gestalt about how they are in the world and over time, learn to change the situation.

For example, people who are very shy can learn they don't have to shrink. They can now be more erect and be bodily present but they don't necessarily have to be more aggressive. They could be differently in the world. And that applies to whether there are

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sexual problems or whether they have post traumatic stress postures which I wrote about in "Insults to Form". People who have been shocked: The shock pattern is a muscular pattern. It has a particular muscular configuration. Could be stiffening in the frozen posture or it could be in the depressed, resigned posture of defeat and how they can experience that. Experience means the motor behavior -- how they can intensify the motor behavior, deintensify the behavior muscularly and by that way teach the cortex how to generate voluntary effort to influence that and change the narrative of behavior.

Closing words:

To recognize that forming your embodied existence is a great joy. It brings happiness. It brings a sense of value and a love of life and other people's lives. It interferes with the process of being a victim or feeling helpless. A helpless feeling that people have doesn't have to have the intensity and the inevitability of it once they can disassemble it they can form another way to be in the world.