New Gestalt Voices is collaborating with Relational Change to make available a £500 bursary from the Relational Change Community to support a piece of research that explores themes of ‘relationality’.

You might already be conducting research in this area or might be keen to start a new piece of research. Whichever is the case, we are keen to hear from you!

You would also be awarded the title of Relational Change Researcher in Residence, with your biography and research topic featuring on the RC website.

- Applications should align broadly with the Relational Change Charter and Statement of Principles: [www.relationalcong.org/charter.html](http://www.relationalcong.org/charter.html)
- It doesn’t have to be connected to an academic qualification.
- It can be any kind of research - quantitative/qualitative/textual, etc.
- The project should run for no more than 12 months.
- Anybody is eligible to apply, and applications will be selected on the basis of the perceived value of the research, and need for the funding.
- If successful, you will be required to produce a presentation or a short article or video for publication on the RC website, and potentially the NGV journal, describing your journey and the outcome of your research.
- Payment of the bursary will be 50% up front and 50% at 6 month stage or on completion, whichever is sooner.

To apply, please submit a 1-2 page description of your project. This should include a research question, a brief description of your intended process, and a timetable. If the bursary is contributing to an existing research project, we’d like to know specifically how our support will make a difference.

This should be emailed to research@newgestaltvoices.org by 31st March 2018. The successful applicant will be notified by end of April.
ABOUT NEW GESTALT VOICES

EDITOR’S LETTER

WHEN THE THERAPIST FALLS | Christine Dukes

THE VOICE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY | David Picó-Vila

COMING OUT IN APPRECIATION | Chris O’Malley

BEING PRESENT AS A TRADER | Steven Goldstein

BITE-SIZE GESTALT THERAPY | Wil L

THREADS HOME | Gabrielle Anaïs Tekerian

IN DEFENSE OF BEING A JERK | Karla Morse

STAYING WITH UBIQUITOUS SHAME | Bernadette O’Koon, Gillian LaRue, Janelle Dixon & Paige Ziegler

A DISCOURSE ON ACCESSIBILITY IN GESTALT PSYCHOTHERAPY | Ayhan Alman de la Osa & Nick Adlington

THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE PNEUMENAL FIELD IN GESTALT THERAPY | Philip Brownell

BOOK REVIEW | Kamila Bialy

PROBLEM PAGE | Dr Fake Pearls

SUPPORTERS

EVENTS AND NOTICES
about the journal

*New Gestalt Voices* is a platform to support mostly those who have not published before to share their writings in relation to gestalt therapy and other applications of gestalt practice.

We publish a twice-yearly journal, which is issued in PDF format on a free subscription basis, with dissemination via all gestalt teaching institutions and major associations.

In addition to the journal, we also enable sharing of other forms of creativity, including images and audio-visual material, on our website. There you’ll find much more information about the journal, the people behind it, and the ways in which you can contribute.

If you’d like to be notified when the next edition is published, please sign up for the NGV newsletter via the website.

The experience of writing and sharing writing can be a lonely one. If you have read an article and been moved or provoked, please tell us and our authors about your experience. Most email addresses follow articles, otherwise please write via the editor-in-chief. We will publish responses in the next edition.

**Publisher:** New Gestalt Voices  
Flat 5, 24 Bemerton Street  
London N1 0BT

**Website:** [www.newgestaltvoices.org](http://www.newgestaltvoices.org)

**For all editorial matters:**  
john@newgestaltvoices.org

**For advertising enquiries:**  
sally@newgestaltvoices.org

**Editor-in-chief & founder:** John Gillespie

**NGV team:** Nils Konstantinovs, Olena Zozulya, Maria Grigorieva, Melissa Sedmak, Ayhan Alman de la Osa, Elena Ryabtseva, Jen Clayton, Dawn Gwilt, Deirdre Foley, Tracey-Kay Coe

**Production editor & webmaster:** Sally Taylor

**Journal design & layout:** Trey Taylor, Sally Taylor

**Disclaimer:** *New Gestalt Voices* is an independent publisher and does not officially endorse any products or services or organisations advertised or otherwise featured in this publication. All text and images are accepted on condition that permission has been given for use in this publication.

**Copyright:** All text, images and design in this publication are subject to copyright. Any unauthorised duplication is strictly prohibited.
As a student-run enterprise, we could not put this journal together without the support and contribution of a significant number of people who have helped to proof-read, edit, and generally to maintain spirits during the sometimes onerous task of producing a journal – TraceyKay Coe, Dawn Gwilt, Jen Clayton, Elena Ryabtseva, Deirdre Foley, and others. It truly takes a community to produce a journal. Thank you all who helped.

I am particularly grateful to Sally Taylor, our print and website editor, for all that she does to showcase the work of our writers and contributors to our blog in the best possible light.

Over the past six months, the NGV community has explored different ways in which we can support greater belonging and voice right across the gestalt profession. We are alive to the lack of support that is often experienced by people who have recently graduated, and the extent to which many of us feel alone with our particular insecurities and vulnerabilities. I was touched by the many who told us they felt supported by the voices in our first edition. I believe we are on to something.

Another development is that NGV is now able to publish longer manuscripts as stand-alone booklets. If your writing warrants a larger audience, but is too long for a typical journal, we will publish you.

I come now to this second edition. It is, if anything, more punchy, and more political than the first.

Christine Dukes, an experienced but never before published therapist, kicks us off with a courageous and deeply moving piece about her personal experience of bereavement. This is a tour de force that well captures Christine’s depth and humility: I challenge you to get through it without tears!

David Picó-Vila, a Spanish therapist and musician, writes about the voice in psychotherapy. This is the first time David has been published in English. This piece highlights the nuances of the role that the voice plays in psychotherapy. It is individual and groundbreaking. David, you must write more!

In this issue we are delighted to be launching a research bursary, with funding supplied by Relational Change to support research in the field of ‘relationality’ (see inside front cover). This is one of a number of practical initiatives we expect to launch over the next year.
Chris O’Malley, a UK-based gestalt therapist, writes on the theme of appreciation. He argues for the centrality of appreciation as a concept foregrounding an attitude towards ‘what is’ – an appreciation even of the difficult and the ugly. His article gestures movingly towards the place of the spiritual in our praxis.

I am delighted to include Steven Goldstein’s article about the application of Relational Change’s SOS model to the financial trading floor. Steven talks about the importance of presence in this environment. We need more and stronger testimony to the various applications of gestalt outside of the therapy room.

Now we come to two very creative writers, each of whom find their own language to conjure a landscape that conveys the poignancy of their personal and familial narratives.

Wil L writes of her journey to and through gestalt. The gratitude she expresses to a past tutor at the end of her article speaks so much for so many of us. I haven’t read much that conveys so well the spirit of what ‘this gestalt shit’ is all about.

Gabrielle Anais Tekerian writes of the disparate threads that lead her “home” – a quest that spans continents and national identities in the search for something that perhaps is only available, ephemerally, in the present moment. This is an achingly beautiful piece of writing.

I am particularly heartened that, given the choice of what to write about, the authors of our next two pieces decided to write about race.

Karla Morse from New Jersey warrants special appreciation for her bravery in sharing her experience of coming to terms with her prejudice – her “inner jerk”. Within a field model where we accept the inevitability that we all hold prejudice, it is nonetheless inspiring and rare to read a piece where the author shares their experiences of grappling with prejudice including racism.

‘Staying with Ubiquitous Shame’ is an article written by Bernadette O’Koon and three doctoral student colleagues at Wright State University School of Professional Psychology in Dayton, Ohio – Gillian LaRue, Janelle Dixon and Paige Ziegler. The article confronts internalised oppression as encountered in a therapy session, and in so doing it speaks for a society and an epoch. I am in awe of all the authors – their honesty and how much they bare of themselves. This is a must read piece.

Next, we have a dialogue in which two of my training colleagues from London, Ayhan Alman de la Osa and Nick Adlington, exchange views on the accessibility of gestalt. I commend this article for Ayhan’s behind-the-scenes re-imagining of how gestalt got its name (it makes me chuckle), and Nick and Ayhan’s thoughtful exchanges. These guys set down a marker for the next generation of gestaltists. Based on their concerns and calibre of dialogue, the state of the gestalt profession is indeed healthy.

Another article I am delighted to include is Phil Brownell’s response to Nils Konstantinovs’ piece in the first edition, on Nils’ experience of gestalt psychotherapy as a religious person. Phil is an experienced gestalt therapist and writer – we welcome contributions from anyone in the field that engages with issues likely to be important.
to newer gestaltists. Phil sets out his ideas about a "pneumenal field" that contains God. He invites exploration of what working within this field might look like. It’s great to push the boundaries of theory in our journal. Thanks, Phil.

Finally, we have a review of Harmut Rosa’s ‘Resonance: A Sociology of the Relationship to the World’ (currently only in German) by Polish therapist and sociologist Kamila Bialy. Harmut’s book traverses territory familiar to gestaltists - how do we escape existential isolation and know the other - yet from the perspective of an adjacent field of study. Kamila’s insightful review will hopefully whet your appetite for the English translation due out later this year.

And finally, finally, please do check out our ‘problem page’ with resident agony uncle, Dr Fake Pearls (who says we take ourselves too seriously?). And please submit problems – from the therapeutic to the domestic – for Dr Pearls to tackle in our next edition.

It remains an immense privilege to be working on this journal. If you are touched by, or enjoy, any of our articles, please tell our contributors. If you would like to write or create for us, or get involved with our community, please contact me.

SEEKING CONTRIBUTIONS

Our next edition is scheduled for publication in July 2018. We welcome anything that can be shared in PDF format. You don’t have to be a student or recently qualified, or a first-time writer. And we are particularly keen to feature more contributions from the many gestaltists working in the coaching and organisational fields – we know you’re out there!

If long-form writing is not your thing, or you’d rather not wait for the next issue of the journal, you might like to produce a shorter piece or a video or something else that can be published immediately on our blog. Please see the website for ideas. There, you’ll also find details of other ways you might contribute, including financially.

TALKING MONEY

We aim to keep this journal free to access. We rely on donations to meet the costs involved in producing each edition and running the website. If you value what we’re doing, please consider helping by contributing to our funds. See page 107 for more information.

JOHN GILLESPIE | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW GESTALT VOICES | JANUARY 2018
"The fading of the past is a vivid reminder of the relentless rush of time. As the past disappears, so does the coil of the future shorten?" – Yalom (1980, p.46)

LIVING THROUGH AN EXISTENTIAL FALL AND THE CONCEPT OF GROUNDLESSNESS

This paper explores how the trauma of bereavement can significantly disrupt and destabilise us to a point where there is a loss of coherence of self and instability of the ground. As therapists, we deal with our client’s existential realities and terror often. However, it is not a case of ‘us and them’, and although we live on the other side of the boundary most of the time, we are all vulnerable, as our own gestalt field can quickly become destabilised.

As a therapist, encountering my own existential anxiety following multiple family bereavements prompted terror, a feeling of groundlessness and a sensation of physically falling into a void. Irvin Yalom (1989, p.4) describes how, when we face any of the four ultimate concerns of life, “freedom/responsibility, death/striving for life, meaning/meaninglessness, isolation/desire for connection” existential anxiety occurs.

I have always been interested in existentialism and its parallels to gestalt. My personal experiences however led me to a dark place where I found myself facing all four existential concerns simultaneously. This proved destabilising, and left me questioning the meaning of life when everything felt meaningless. I lost all sense of cohesion and who I was in the world. This lived experience left me wanting to understand my process and make sense of it theoretically. I kept a diary during this time. This paper describes my experience as I explore the concept of existential falling and how this translates into gestalt and existential theory.

Drawing on Perl’s (1969) ‘Five layer model of personality’ and Denham-Vaughan’s (2010) writings and workshop on the ‘Liminal Space’ (2014), I describe my experience of physically stepping into an anxiety-filled impasse. I explore how, with the use of self and environmental support, co-created lived gestalt experimentation and a belief that our experience is always rooted in the present moment, I reach the peak of a phenomenological transition and transformation to a more grounded and emergent sense of self. I go on to reflect on my reviewed understanding of grief, how
it is a non-linear process, and how we are all deeply interconnected and that grief is a phenomenon of the field.

**DEATH COMES**

Part of writing this paper is a belief that I can do it, that I have something to say, rather than hiding in the shadows, frightened to put myself out there or reach any growth-full potential. This is a metaphor of how I was living my life, afraid to experiment, push myself to an edge or let go of control. It is, at times, hard to imagine that I have trained as a gestalt psychotherapist, where the emphasis is so much on living in the moment, being present, experimentation, and exploring growing edges at the contact boundary. Instead, I seemed to be stuck in a quagmire of death and dying that severely interrupted my life force and transformed my energies into a depressed place of grief and loss, rather than vibrant aliveness. I felt stuck in a ‘groundhog day’ and couldn’t find a way out.

This begun in 2008 with the death of my brother, followed closely by my father in 2009, and more recently my mother’s death in 2014. It felt like a part of me had died with them. My body felt rigid and my feelings dulled and became numb, as I experienced my life’s vitality slipping further into a void of nothingness. I struggled to cope with the meaning of the losses and fundamentally the meaning of life, my life.

I believed somehow as a therapist I should be able to cope with my suffering, and as a result withdrew increasingly into a place of isolation. In ‘The Myth of the Untroubled Therapist’, Adams (2014, p.8) describes how no-one is immune from the vagaries of life. In her experience and research, she illustrates that many therapists often experience shame and hide their vulnerabilities, finding it hard to reach out in times of personal struggle. My feelings of grief, isolation and general low mood certainly made it hard to reach out or seek support. There is an alleviation of shame in choosing to write about it, and an acceptance that as therapists we can all be vulnerable and none of us are infallible.

In 2008, my only brother, Christopher, was diagnosed and died within eight weeks from a terminal cancer. During this time, I went to live with him and stayed with him throughout. This was a difficult and challenging time for me, but in retrospect I’m glad I could be there with him. He demonstrated to me how to have a good death; in other words, he lived his life to the full. He was alive, truly alive. More alive than I had ever seen him, living moment by moment with a vibrancy I had never witnessed before.

Yalom (1980, p.161) describes how “Many patients with cancer report that they live more fully in the present. They no longer postpone living until sometime in the future, the present not the future is the eternal tense”.

This was certainly true in my brother’s case. He saw his friends, ate his favourite foods, watched films, gave presents, and above all said the things he wanted before he finally departed this world. Feared introjects dissipated and there seemed little evidence of stifling retroflection going on. He was very present and alive.

During this time, I experienced moments of deep connection with Christopher,
what Buber (1958) would describe as true authentic “I-thou meeting”. No holds were barred. There was no waiting until tomorrow. Conversations needed to happen now, and they did; something that probably would never have been risked if we thought time was on our side. We had courageous dialogue. Staying present for me was challenging, painful, raw, but above all I felt alive and am grateful to have been there with him, moment by moment. I am reminded of Martin Buber’s words (1958, p.31), “In the beginning is relation, and in that moment, nothing else mattered.”

“All real living is meeting” ~ Buber (1958, p.26)

MEANING AND MEANINGLESSNESS

The shock, however, that Christopher’s life ended at the age of fifty-two still resonates hard in me and brings tears for the sadness that it was somehow cut short.

Cut short.

What does that mean? It is as if I believed that we had some right to expect something different!

How so? As death is inextricably a part of life: “life and death are interdependent; they exist simultaneously, not consecutively; death whirs continuously beneath the membrane of life and exerts a vast influence upon experience and conduct” (Yalom, 1980, p.29). There is still a discomfort in thinking this way for me. Somehow, death is something out there, to come, but not yet here. Time is on my side. Time to plan and discuss what I want for my own death. I believe this is a desensitisation that prevails in many of us, a deflective process that wards off our death anxiety. People don’t generally like to talk about death, and certainly not their own. It is usually something that happens to someone else.

Yalom considers death and life as interdependent, and says the concept of death plays a crucial role in psychotherapy because it is paramount in the life experience of each of us. He was influenced by existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962), who conceptualised that although the physicality of death destroys us, the idea of death saves us. Yalom (1980, p.40) explains the meaning behind Heidegger’s theory, saying that one’s recognition and acceptance of death can contribute a sense of poignancy to life and provide a radical shift of life perspective. Moreover, such a realisation can “transport one from a mode of living characterised by diversions, tranquillisation, and petty anxieties to a more authentic mode”.

I believe this has been true in my case and has shifted my capacity to live more authentically. Following my brother’s death, I was certainly left with the question, what gives meaning to life or is it all in fact meaningless? Frankl (1977, p.141) writes how “such lack of meaning creates the paramount existential stress - an existential sickness: as to the feeling of meaningless, per se, it is an existential despair and a spiritual distress rather than an emotional disease or a mental illness.”

DEATH AND GESTALT

In gestalt theory, death forms part of the gestalt cycle of formation and destruction. As we travel through the gestalt contact cycle, there is an arriving at the final gestalt, our final contact into the unknown, a resting
place in the fertile void forever. Trauma, loss and grief probably make up a large proportion of the personal experiences of our clients, and there is no doubt it is hard for us all to dodge the bullet of human suffering impacting on our lives at some point. Birth and death, after all, are the only two true certainties we have.

Surprisingly, when researching the subject of death and dying in gestalt literature, I initially could find only a limited amount written on it. Ken Evans writes moving autobiographical notes on the death of his wife (Evans, 2000). It is with sadness that Ken has since also departed this earth, but not without leaving his mark on it. Stephanie Sabar's (2000) paper in the Gestalt Review on ‘Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning’ also gave me some good leads and helped me to formulate some of my thinking. Melnick and Roos' (2007, p.90-107) ‘The Myth of Closure' was written following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The authors describe an emerging non-linear paradigm for grief and loss, and emphasise an evolving gestalt perspective. Their writing supported me in better understanding my own grief process and took away a lot of preconceptions of what grief should be. There is a clear model for gestalt and the grieving process written by Carmen Vánquez Bandin (2012), and Leanne O'Shea (2005) gives an overview of grief work from a gestalt perspective. Other gestaltists have also written about the subject of death and grief in more general gestalt writings.

In Kepner's ‘Body Process’ (1993), he describes the interruptions to disengaging from contact. Melnick and Nevis (1997) describe stages of grief as the demobilization phase. Polster (1995), in ‘A Population of Selves,’ speaks of the loss of a sense of self after a death. However, it is mainly the work of the existential writers Yalom (1980) and Van Deurzen- Smith (1997), and the “death layer” described by Perls (1969) in his five-layer model of neurosis, that has supported me in understanding my own process. It has also been through my lived experiences of grief and work completed on ‘The Liminal Space’ workshop run by Sally Denham-Vaughan in 2014, and the use of experimentation, presence, and support so fundamental in gestalt therapy, which has enabled me to process, creatively adjust, and assimilate my experiences of loss and move through the impasse I found myself stuck in.

**PERLS’ FIVE-LAYER MODEL**

In the 1960s Perls described “the layers of the neurotic personality”, a phenomenological description of the experience and behaviours of people who have substituted a more rigid ‘character’ in place of the fluid self. In his five-layer model, he saw character as being a product of, and adaptation to, the requirements of the external field or environment. These adaptations eventually become frozen, forming a fixed self-concept (Perls,1969). In existential terms, we are living habitually or inauthentically.

I have chosen this model as a way of working through and understanding my own process and the defence layers that had formed over my authentic functioning. I will demonstrate this more later on in the text, but believe it is a model that fits well with the existentialism inherent with the gestalt approach of experiment. Referred to as the ‘peeling the onion’ metaphor, he connects the implosion layer with death or the fear of death, and the expression of grief with the explosion layer as described by Perls (1969, p.56).
I have borrowed from Peter Philippson's (2002) description of Perls' five-layer model and abridged it slightly for this paper.

The layers are as follows:

• Cliché layer: social chat, avoiding what is significant.
• Role-playing layer: an adopted, superficial and fixed position, the individual plays an habitual and polarised role, limited self-description and range of ways of being in the world.
• Impasse/phobic layer: the Individual has adopted a fixed role, a defensive manoeuvre to avoid risking or entering unpredictability. The individual becomes phobic, usually tries to sidestep into something more known. Place of stuckness.
• Implosion/death layer: themes of paralysis and death arise. The ‘vertigo of possibility’. The individual is called on to choose a way forward that is her own, something she has avoided doing. It is the tension of being caught between many possible actions.
• Explosion: not strictly a layer, but the release of energy in action and emotion as the individual makes her own authentic choice of path. The task of the therapist is to witness, acknowledge and engage in the choosing.

In Perls' model, each layer acts as a defence against moving to the next. The layers are consecutive and need to be worked through to move away from anxiety. It is a specific structural model that works well with neurotic processes and the moving away from our existential anxiety. For me, structure is the way I keep myself safe, a defence mechanism, but also a way in which I support myself.

It is how I organismically self-regulate and manipulate my environment to act in certain ways towards me. This is how I creatively adjust in response to the demands of my environment. From this perspective, neurosis is predictability, and gestalt therapy aims to facilitate unpredictability and support us to move out of the safety of knowing into one of being. This is often done using experimentation and trying something different. What is known in gestalt therapy as the ‘safe emergency’ (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1994/1951), is where the therapist works with the client at the impasse on how much support and challenge the client can usefully face without becoming overwhelmed or being tipped into a place of panic or hyperarousal. As gestaltists, we focus very much on living in the here and now, moment by moment. But how many of us are truly living, risking, experimenting, living out our lives authentically, for fear of falling or staring into the void?

DEATH AND STRIVING FOR LIFE

Over the years, I have trodden a close path alongside death. It is not something that I am unfamiliar with or shy away from. As a general and psychiatric nurse, I have been at the bedside of the sick and dying, and witnessed and held the hand of a dying person on numerous occasions, young and old. No two deaths are the same. Some are sudden, some are planned, and some linger for weeks, months, even years. Some deaths are serene and peaceful, some are agonising to watch. I have witnessed the desperate scars and overdosed faces of those who have had failed suicide attempts, and sadly on occasion of those who have succeeded. I have lost close friends and witnessed the early days of HIV and AIDS in the 1980s.
Knowing all this, I thought I would be okay when my mother died; there was almost a sense of blaséness about me. This was the last of my family bereavements, which came in January 2014. Watching the death of my mother, after having witnessed years of her slow decline into Parkinson's disease, came with a sense of relief that she would finally be released from her suffering, and I guess I would be relieved of my caring duties. I'm not sure which was the most painful, my brother's death, as he was taken down from being a six foot plus, sturdy and fit man, to becoming a yellow bloated cancer victim, or my mother, who over the course of twelve years was increasingly more locked inside her own body, losing co-ordination, frustrated by cogwheel rigidity, as a progressive Parkinsonian dementia set in, fragmenting her once complete and very sharp mind.

Following my mother's death, I believed I had gone through all I needed to go through for a while. There was no one left to die, except me of course, and the last seven years had consisted of planning funerals, writing obituaries, sorting out wills, probate and gradually coming to terms with my various losses. This is how it had been for both my brother and my father's death so nothing quite prepared me for what happened after my mother died. I can only describe it as an existential crisis.

**Diary entry:** Existential anxiety hits me unexpectedly, it comes from nowhere. It has no form, no object. It is about no-thing. It is unsettling me, terrifying, especially as I don't know what I'm afraid of. Fear is not even the correct term to use, as there is no distinctive object, or concrete enemy to fight back or to fly away from. This existential anxiety is about being, it is warning me somehow, that I'm failing myself, or falling short of my potentiality in the world.

The stark realisation that I had spent the last twelve years caring directly and indirectly for all my family members suddenly hit me. The truth was, I had lamely hidden behind all these expectations as a defence against my own fear of living. This was my prize deflection and a wakeup call that things were about to change. It's easier to be a carer, and sacrifice my own life in the service of others. It is what gave me meaning, defined me and gave meaning to my world. Now there was nothing, a nothingness, a meaningless. In fact, everything felt meaningless. I was adrift, I had lost my role.

Hiding and deflection had been the name of the game and suddenly all my powerful introjects, retroflected desires and stifled passion for life were being lifted into a sharp awareness where ground became figure with a Belisha beacon ferociously illuminating it. Balfour Mount's description of the existential moment could apply equally to the groundlessness that comes with being shaken to the core:

“A crack appears in our carefully crafted concept of reality... The very nature of reality is experienced in a new way. We are sucked into the startling realisation that the rules of the game are not what we had imagined.”~ Mount (2003, p.40-42)

**THE FALL COMES**

“He who jumps into the void owes no explanation to those who stand and watch.”~ Jean-Luc Godard (2017)
Over the following weeks I began to experience myself as though free-falling, a terrifying sensation of physically falling through the air, no ground, just a vast gaping hole where the ground once stood, trapped, peering into a hole of infinity, black, dark endless infinity, feeling myself falling faster and faster into this void, nothing to grab hold of, anchor to, sheer panic-stricken falling.

The notion in gestalt of remaining present, staying in the moment, the here and now, clearly applies here. I often sit with clients who are in a state of panic and fear, encouraging them to breathe and stay in contact, ground themselves using their feet on the floor or feeling the support of the chair underneath them. Believe me, it isn't so easy when there is no floor, no ground, just a black hole of nothing. These feelings could quite literally come on at any time. I remember walking my dog in the park and needing to hold my back up against a tree as a means of supporting myself. I learnt to breathe more and, above all, not look down. If I didn’t look down, I eventually could manage to calm myself, but I often felt out of control in a place of raw fear and falling.

Gestalt describes the fundamental and specific characteristics of a panic attack as the ground becomes figure because of its collapse. Francesetti (2007, p.74) describes how “the ground, against which a figure is being created, suddenly appears highly problematic and precarious, about to shatter and collapse”. If the ground collapses, we become groundless, and if we are groundless, there is nothing supporting us and we fall. Encountering this nothingness at my core caused existential anxiety, a feeling of groundlessness, emptiness, spinning. Typically, we experience this existential anxiety when we become fully aware of any of the four ultimate concerns of life, which are expressed as paradoxes: freedom/responsibility, death/striving for life, meaning/meaninglessness, isolation/desire for connection.

For most of us, existential anxiety is an intolerable feeling, and we use a variety of resistances to avoid experiencing it. When this happens, our healthy existential anxiety evolves into unhealthy neurotic anxiety.

Melnick and Roos (2007, p.104) describe how “Life is a continuous process of holding on and letting go. Most of the time, the process occurs gracefully, with little awareness. However, grief often triggers a premature rupture. We are forced to end a relationship long before we are ready. As a result, we are thrown out of our rhythm. We are forced to deal with constructing a new sense of order in a revised world, and a new balance.”

I was out of rhythm; my whole being was thrown into disarray.

FIELD CONDITIONS

To begin to make sense of all of this, it is important that I introduce you to something of my own historic field conditions and family of origin. I can now see why I was so deeply impacted by their deaths.

I would certainly describe my personality style as that of a more dependent nature. Having come from a closely-knit family unit, which probably fostered a style of co-dependency rather than individualisation, I had grown up feeling shy and frightened of the world. My parents were also afraid of life, focusing more on catastrophe rather than
experimentation. My father had Victorian values and projected his fears of difference and prejudices onto my brother and myself. Nothing was ever right or good enough, and my creative adjustments at that time were to develop a false self as a way of coping with what was, by then, deeply held introjected fears often based on guilt and shame. It was safer for me to be a dutiful daughter, often retroreflecting my own needs, rather than face up to a barrage of hypocrisy and projected insecurities. To survive, I learned early on to split off aspects of myself by living different compartmentalised lives. This way of being became very fixed, as I polarised parts of self.

Perls would describe this as the ‘cliché’ and ‘role playing’ layers in his five-layer model (Perls, 1969). My early life field conditions had clearly laid down some deep-seated shame binds, which I frequently battled with throughout my therapy training. I don’t think I had fully realised just how rigid this split was until my mother’s death and the sudden liberation of not needing to live like this anymore, liberating and terrifying at the same time, and what precipitated the fall. As such, Yalom describes how freedom in this sense has terrifying implications. It means that beneath us there is no ground - nothing, a void, and an abyss. A key existential dynamic then is the clash between our confrontation with groundlessness, and our wish to ground and structure according to Yalom (1980, p.9).

I was identifying with a limited self-description or personality function and a limited range of ways of being in the world. For years I had remained stuck and continued to deflect away by hiding in my dutiful daughter role, with no available energy for an explosion of authentic functioning in the world. To move beyond this role meant stepping from the impasse/phobic layer (my adopted fixed role, a defensive manoeuvre to avoid risk) and, with sufficient support, entering the unpredictability of the implosion/death layer.

The fall would happen each time I got close to moving away from the impasse, as there was insufficient self or environmental support to move beyond it. This anxiety was terrifying to the point where I believed that I might not be able to survive. Consequently, each time the whirl started, fear and panic began to overwhelm me. I felt desperate and confused, terrified, in fact, to the point my whole body went into shock or paralysis. Joyce and Sills (2014, p.125) describe this place of impasse as “She is blocked by fear or the sense of danger as if her very life was threatened. To explore further seems unsafe or impossible. The fear can often be a nameless void, like standing at the edge of an abyss”. Perls, Hefferline & Goodman (1951/1994) identified that this place of impasse is often the place of most potential change and growth.

MOVING INTO THE LIMINAL SPACE AND HEALING

Shortly after my mother’s death I attended the third of three workshops entitled ‘The Liminal Space, Integration and Transformation’ (2014), run by Sally Denham-Vaughan. For me, it is never coincidental that the right workshop comes along at the right time. Call it serendipity if you like, but the field always seems to provide. Arthur Roberts (1999, p.35-36) describes it as “The field talks back”, where there is an organising force at work prior to our own constructions and ideas and that there is a trustworthy order in nature.
What is a liminal space? Denham-Vaughan describes the liminal space in the ‘Marianne Fry Lecture’ (2010) as standing on a threshold, anticipating moving forward into something new, a threshold of change, where life has opened in front of us with a call we hadn’t anticipated or known. I am using this model as I believe there are parallels to what Perls describes in his impasse and implosive or death layer. In trauma, we are often in a state of overwhelm as there is insufficient support to stay with any one figure formation long enough for it to develop. This occurs often between mobilisation and action on the gestalt contact cycle; figure formation is happening too quickly, which leads to a state of hyper-arousal, what Denham-Vaughan describes as the ‘liminoid’ where the individual feels overwhelmed. At the other end of the polarity is a place of hypo-arousal, vagueness, dissociation or a withdrawal away from the contact boundary into a depressed place of low energy where clear figure formation can’t occur, called ‘limbo’(hypo-arousal), feeling frozen or paralysed. Similar to Siegel’s (1999) ‘Window of tolerance model’, Denham-Vaughan links the liminal space to gestalt theory as a way of illustrating the oscillation of energy that occurs between hypo and hyper arousal at the contact boundary. The trick is to learn to stay in the liminal space long enough, with sufficient self and environmental support for clear figures to be able to form.

To illustrate this more clearly, the liminal space to me is a place of potential for transition and transformation, similar here to Perls’ implosive or death layer. However, I was either stuck in a lost, confused and withdrawn place (limbo) or otherwise wobbling on a precarious edge, trapped in a state where it felt dangerous to stand still, in hyper-arousal (liminoid). There was insufficient support for me to form clear figures; instead, I was overwhelmed, feeling pushed forward faster than I was ready to. As a result, each time the ground would collapse, and I would experience the sensation of falling. The experience was visceral, a sensation of my body being pulled forwards into a void, like I was falling to my own death.

To be able to stay in the liminal space long enough for the transformational process to happen, I needed support. And in my state of panic, I needed the ground to be sufficiently supported for the contact sequence to be completed. When a person is in blind panic the ground shatters and the figure disintegrates. As identified by Melnick and Roos (2007, p.99), in grief, most experiences of stuckness consist of a split between the strong desire to hold onto a significant relationship, the status quo, specific interconnectivity, a certain sense of self, and a wish or need to let go and move on. This is what causes the stuckness and for me is the painful, raw and conflicting dilemma of the trauma of grief.

**Diary entry:** Days have passed, I enter the liminal space workshop, I am panting to get there, to explode my stuff amidst generous supportive others who will not run from the ugliness of the dying, the ones who will sit with me in this place of existential angst, hold the line, chafe their hands till the blood runs raw along the slipping rope down into the crater of the inevitable. Who will walk with me on this death line, hold my hand tightly as I gape into the basis of solitude, the place of no return, the place I can only go to and must do so alone. And here I am stood there wobbling on the edge, staring down into the beyond, the dark
black hole of nothingness. I feel cold, icy cold like a dead person, shivering I grab a blanket and wrap it around myself. This is the death walk but not mine, I am carrying the existential terror, the ancestral lineage. The choice of falling into death or holding the line. Falling through the void and out through the other side, back into life, the light, the energy, the fractals of a multitude of possibilities.

LEARNING TO FALL


Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb (2017, p.33) states “There are times when therapist and client do something together which loosens a fixed gestalt by addressing a third element, which allows them to get out of an impasse. It is a courageous step to take, to be focused on something else which attracts them both and creates something that transcends them. This step is what we call an experiment: an attempt to include something novel in the field to expand contact possibilities and awareness”.

For me the ground was ready. The environmental support of the field was in place. Sally has known me as a colleague for several years and those who attended the liminal space workshop were also experienced gestalt therapists, some of whom I knew well and trusted. With their support, the movement could begin. In gestalt psychotherapy, each intervention is founded on the analysis of the contact sequence, and it is the contact at the boundary of the therapeutic relationship that provides the ground and support so vital in overcoming fear and isolation. I knew I could walk up to the void with Sally’s support. I sensed her presence and resonance as I faced my fear and steadied myself with my breathing. Having the support of another in this terrifying place, someone to walk with me, someone to walk alongside me, someone to support my back made it possible for me to move beyond the impasse.

The cycle of awareness describes the flow of energy, how it is blocked, how it is managed, and how to hold or increase energy and excitement at certain points. So, working slowly, with gentle words of encouragement, together in a co-created movement, we could take bold steps. On this occasion as I looked down into the void, I was physically shaking, but very present and able to stay in the moment. Somehow, I was no longer afraid. Gazing into the void on that day with the clear instruction that I could consider it, but that I didn’t have to fall into it, was the key. A moment where my fears of the future alone without my family starkly hit me, but also that I was alive, my future and how I wanted to live from now on was mine and mine alone. This experience felt beyond empathy. It was more a movement away from the deadness, isolation and fear towards a more felt sense of self and connection again with the world. I had the capacity to change and transform my life and take risks with a new-found sense of agency. I was no longer stuck; I had choices and was alive. I had reached my moment of explosion. The unbearable vertigo dissipated and I sensed a renewed energy return.

Attending this workshop, I believe, saved me. A place where the use of experiment, presence, contact and the support of another could not be underestimated in that moment. Jacobs (2006, p.11) describes “support as contextually emergent”, wherein she defines
therapeutic support as that which enables a client ... to do (or experience) something; ... to acquire an until-now lacking ability ... the accessibility of which has been blocked by fears; [or that] makes it possible for a client to take the respective next step that is necessary to acquire an until-now lacking ability [or] ... experience”.

To quote Laura Perls (1992, p.122), “Real creativeness, in my experience is inextricably linked with the awareness of mortality. The sharper this awareness, the greater the urge to bring forth something new, to participate in the infinitely continuing creativeness in nature. This is what makes out of sex, love; out of the herd, society; out of corn and fruit, bread and wine; out of sound, music. This is what makes life liveable and – incidentally-therapy possible”.

For me, it is what makes death into life and turned my darkness into light.

RE-CONTACTING MY VITALITY

My sense of equilibrium and energy has returned. I am also contacting a more growthful and ongoing emergent part of self. In writing this paper I have also reflected on the concept of grieving and what that means. During the early months following my mother’s death, I had entered back into personal therapy with an existential psychotherapist believing I needed to grieve and go through a process of coming to terms with what had happened in my life. My thoughts were around a linear process of closure, involving denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Such linear models, I believe, have instilled an expectation for resolution and closure.

Nothing could be further from the truth and, although I can resonate with some of the words of the Kübler-Ross model (1969), commonly known as the five stages of grief, my phenomenological experiences of loss have been very different. My realisation is that there is no closure, just a different way of being in the world, and that my family were all dead and weren’t coming back. Finding Melnick and Roos’ paper on closure greatly supported my thinking and provided confirmation about my whole sense of being in relation to my losses.

“For during a lifespan, important losses become vibrant markers in the ‘history of the field’. These markers heighten our consciousness of how our continuing attachments to those we have lost shape our identities and influence existential struggles that are developmental, and how they support us as resources in reconstructing meaning in the aftermath of loss.”~ Melnick and Roos (2007, p.101)

My identity is deeply embedded in my history and relationships with my family; my capacity to maintain a dialogic connection through representations and memories of them supports and maintains a greater sense of continuity of self. “Belonging is a significant element of the ground in which the individual puts down his or her roots, which provides sustenance and security at the most basic, fundamental level” as described by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951/1994), Francesetti (2007, p.101). My life now is very different. I experience a sense of sadness often and miss my family deeply. Their deaths have exposed me to a solitude and vulnerability. But I remain a part of them and they remain always a part of me in the world as I continue to emerge and evolve.
I notice I work harder at sustaining my relationships and value more the importance of others in my life. It is only in relationship and connection that my life has true meaning. When death is excluded, life becomes impoverished. Death is the condition that has enabled me to live life in a more authentic way, moment by moment, here and now.

My experiences of grief have given freedom. This can be daunting and precarious, but also brings vibrancy, a new-found energy and a sense that there is no time to waste, and the time is now. At the heart of Yalom’s dictum is the theory that as human beings we all face the four ultimate concerns of death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness.

“They are particularly relevant to psychotherapy: the inevitability of death for each of us and those we love; the freedom to make our lives as we will; our ultimate aloneness; and finally, the absence of any meaning or sense to our life. However grim these givens may seem they contain the seeds of wisdom and redemption.”~ Yalom (1989, p.4)

“It is only when we face up to it squarely can we take our time on this earth seriously and make the most of it”, as posited by Van Deurzen-Smith (1997, p.111). I have learnt this and writing this paper, although it is not the most joyous of subjects, has supported my grieving process by bringing it into the narrative. It is my truth and has enabled a catharsis and a sense of connection by sharing my experience with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Sally Denham-Vaughan and all those who supported me on the liminal space workshop in 2014; you will know who you are.

My thanks also to Cheryl Keen and Dinah Ashcroft for their support with editing, and Emilyn Claid for her encouragement and conversations on falling.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of my brother, Christopher James Noel Dukes, 25th December 1955 – 17th September 2008.

REFERENCES


Kepner, James I. (1993) Withdrawal, Assimilation and


---

**Christine Dukes** is a gestalt psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer living and working in Kent in the UK. She retired as a nurse from the British National Health Service in 2013, after specialising and working within addiction services for over twenty-five years. She currently runs a private psychotherapy service, offers workshops, supervision and personal development groups. Her hobbies include travelling around the country in her motorhome called Fritz and being out and about in nature. eostar47@btinternet.com
When I first started to be actively interested in the human voice and its relationship with the psychological aspects of the person, I was surprised to find out that, even though the subject is central to our lives, it seems to be difficult to study from the point of view of psychotherapy and psychology. It wasn't easy to find references to it in the literature. Still, I have found many people who explain they feel an uneasiness of some sort with their voice. Everyone seems to agree that the voice is a very important issue, both from a personal point of view and from the point of view of clinical practice. However, the subject seems to be somewhat slippery and difficult to define precisely. We know it is important but we are not very good at talking about it.

The literature about non-verbal communication confirms that the amount of information that is transmitted through the non-verbal aspects of the voice (intonation, timbre, volume, non-verbal sounds, etc.) is huge. However, it is not easy to find insights about the details of how this happens, i.e., about how this information is generated or connected to the speaker. There is much more written about non-verbal expression through gestures, body movement or the usage of space.

Maybe the first difficulty in dealing with the voice is that, in general, it is not easy to describe the sound. Most college programs in art history, in Spain at least, devote a relatively small part of their curricula to the history of music. These degrees are mainly devoted to the ‘arts of things’, so to speak: visual arts and architecture. The ‘arts of processes’, of energy in movement, are not that much studied: music, theatre, rhetorics or poetry. Among these, maybe music is the one that receives least attention. In the Spanish education system, the history of music is only studied in some depth in the conservatories, which do not belong to the university system.

In the field of psychotherapy, my perception is that it is also easier to think in terms of things or objects, rather than dealing with dynamic processes. We usually find discrete easier than continuous. In the psychology degrees, the issue of voice is barely
discussed, neither during training in gestalt therapy nor in the gestalt therapy literature. We know much more about the verbal aspects of the voice – the content of what patients and therapists say, the subtleties in the exact wording, the choice of verbs or adverbs, and so on – than about the non-verbal, that is, the sound itself. We usually know more about creative work with plastic mediators such as painting, clay or sculpture, than with the voice. Singing, reciting, uttering sounds, speaking with different tones, are sometimes used as a resource in psychotherapy, but they usually have a marginal presence or they are present in a not very conscious way. The information we receive from our clients when we listen to the quality of their voice moment-by-moment, constitutes a significant part of what we ‘intuitively’ know about them. We often talk about ‘intuition’ to refer to information that we can sense rather than think about, or things that we know but we do not know exactly where we learnt them. Our own tone of voice as therapists, in front of our clients, emerges from our presence moment-by-moment, from our attitude and intentions. However, we tend to be more aware of our body position, our facial expression and our inner feelings, than we are of the timbre of our voice and its shades. We know how to keep an upright or quiet posture, but we often encounter a bigger trouble if we attempt to adjust our voice.

My voice and my performance as a musician have been a thermometer for my personal development throughout my life. When I was young, I interrupted my piano studies to put my efforts into studying an engineering degree. I knew there was something within myself that was making my artistic expression quite difficult. No matter how much I practiced, that difficulty would not disappear. I felt myself as a rigid, mechanical and expressionless pianist. It was impossible for me to connect my fingers to my inner sensations and feelings, which were strong but seemed to be locked inside. Interestingly, when I started my therapy process – for unconnected reasons – one of the most reliable indicators I had of how I was changing was how I felt when I played the piano. It was amazing to see how every transformation I undertook in my personal relationships, in the way I lived my relationship with others, had an immediate impact on my musical performance. Later, I began a degree on singing at the conservatory and this was accentuated. Sometimes it seemed that I got better as a musician through psychotherapy than through practice! I have never become a great singer or a great piano player, but I have often contacted with the anguish that is felt when you want to express yourself, and your body and your voice do not respond, or they respond in a way that you can’t understand, that seems alien to you. My motivation for studying the voice in therapy arises from this experience.

This article is just my first attempt to approach the phenomenon of the voice. I would like to share my curiosity and open new possibilities. I am convinced that a contribution to this field from the insights of the theory of gestalt therapy will be illuminative. I would like this text to be an invitation to discussion and to further sharing of ideas. In the following sections, I will first present a review of some important dimensions that, in my opinion, relate to the voice, and then a brief description of different therapeutic approaches that put their focus on it. In the last part, I will try to draft a
perspective of the voice from the theory of gestalt therapy and discuss how this perspective can guide us in clinical practice.

**DIMENSIONS OF THE VOICE**

**VERBAL AND NON VERBAL**

We usually distinguish two aspects when we talk about the voice: the verbal and the nonverbal. The verbal part of the voice has to do with the speech and it involves words, phrases and other aspects that contain linguistic information, such as the intonation that denotes that a sentence is a question. The nonverbal aspects include everything else: nonverbal sounds (grunts, screams, sighs) and various sound parameters that are present in verbal and nonverbal sounds, such as timbre, intensity, speaking rate, clarity of consonants, projection, pace, tone, etc.

The same sentence can be uttered by different people in different situations and, although the phrase may be the same, the voice that utters it contains nonverbal information that changes from person to person and informs us, not of the contents of what is being said, but about the characteristics of the speaker and the context. We can come to discern whether the speaker is a man or a woman, his or her age, roughly, his or her geographical and sociocultural background, health status, mood, or type of relationship with the listener or listeners. We can also gather information on how convinced the speaker is of what he or she is saying, whether the speaker is giving all the relevant information or not, whether the speaker is feeling threatened, etc. Sometimes, I have asked participants in group workshops on voice to listen to the sound of film scenes without seeing the images. For this, I use scenes in languages that listeners cannot understand (e.g. Chinese or Danish). They are often surprised to find the huge amount of information they are able to extract just from the sound of the voices, in relation to what is happening in the scene: who the characters are, what emotions they are feeling and how they relate to each other. And all this without seeing the images or understanding the words.

**VOICE AND DEVELOPMENT**

The sense of hearing is the first sensory organ that starts working. From the first months of uterine life the fetus is able to hear the sound environment and, especially, the voice of its mother. Alfred Tomatis, the creator of audio-psycho-phonology, discovered how the mother’s voice has an influence on the development of the newborn-to-be (Tomatis, 1989). The Tomatis Method is a therapeutic method based on auditory stimulation with filtered sounds that simulate the so-called ‘sonic birth’, i.e., the passage from hearing in the womb’s aqueous environment to hearing in the air. According to Tomatis, this transition takes several days after birth until infants drain the fluid from their ears and replace it with air. During this period, the mother’s voice is one of the few things that the baby can recognize as familiar and gives the baby a sense of security.

The voice also has a major role during birth. The first cry of the baby often emerges immediately after the first inspiration. The vocal folds close to produce the voice sound. This closure increases the pressure in the lungs and this helps them to get up and running. The voice is maybe the first act by which the baby is able to concentrate its
energy and throw it towards its environment. It may be the baby's first attempt of reaching the environment. At the same time, the sound of his own crying comes back through his ears. The baby hears himself. His voice gives him one of the first building elements on which to base his sense of differentiation, ‘I / not I’ with respect to the environment, something like “This sound that co-occurs with these muscular sensations in my lungs and throat, is me. The other sounds are not me”.

In the rest of our life, the voice also signals several developmental milestones. The emissions of the first non-vocal sounds that are not crying are simultaneous with the baby's increased capabilities of scanning the environment. The first words and the first “mum” or “dad” open a new world of relationships with others through language. The voice changes at puberty, especially in males, mark the entrance into adulthood and the voice keeps changing from youth to old age, as our body is transformed. From before birth until death, the voice is present and inextricably linked to who we are and where we are in our life cycle.

THE VOICE AND THE BODY

Phonation is an act that involves almost the entire body. Uttering a vocal sound requires an activation of the pelvic floor, abdominal muscles, chest, diaphragm, lungs, trachea, larynx and vocal cords, pharynx, tongue, teeth and jaw, lips, palate and nasal cavity. The state of tension or relaxation of these body parts directly influences the qualities and possibilities of the voice. Other parts of the body, although not directly involved in the creation of sound, are also connected and can influence phonation. I am thinking, for example, in the tension in shoulders and neck muscles that can reduce the breathing capacity and/or stress the larynx. A congested state of the digestive tract can hinder the movement of the abdominal muscles or the diaphragm.

THE VOICE, THE GROUP AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Singing and dancing are two of the most important forms of expression of the group. The singing voice and the recited voice appear in all cultures in social events that need a reinforcement of the feeling of belonging to the group (Gregory, 2004). A quick look brings plenty of examples: tribal songs, stories passed down by oral tradition, military and religious hymns, children's songs, travel songs, slogans that are shouted or sung at sport events or political protests, the particular intonations of political speeches, funeral songs, solemn songs, festive songs... the power of the voice for moving emotions and producing group cohesion and a sense of belonging is unquestionable.

Other aspects of the spoken voice contain information about the group bonds of each individual. The accent and the use of certain words and expressions often make it possible to recognize the group of origin of a person, not just the country but the specific region and sometimes even the town or neighborhood. There are expressions and tones of voice that belong to speakers of a certain generation. When we hear old recordings of radio or television news, it is easy to notice how the intonation of journalists has changed over the years. The language of adolescents continuously generates new expressions that differentiate them from the way children speak, but
also from adults. There is a ‘teen slang’. Social classes have pronunciation ticks. For instance, in the Spanish spoken in Spain, whistling the ‘s’ or nasalizing some vowels are recognized as signs of belonging to a higher social position. People who emigrate to a country where the spoken language is different to their own, or even if it is the same language but a different dialect, are able to learn the language and lose their native accent depending on, among other things, their desire to belong to the new country and their need to maintain a loyalty to their country of origin. A common indicator of the level of integration of an immigrant is whether the person has or does not have a strong accent.

Our voice provides information about our membership groups to others, but it also contains information that identifies us as individuals. Each person’s voice is unique as a fingerprint, and our auditory system is especially equipped to distinguish the tonal nuances that differentiate the voice of one person from another. Each person has a different voice, as each vocal apparatus is different (a wider or narrower larynx, longer or shorter vocal folds, etc.)

The voice also contains a lot of information about the psychological characteristics of the person. A reference that is often cited in this regard is the work of the laryngologist and psychoanalyst Paul J. Moses, reflected in his only book The Voice of Neurosis (Moses, 1954). In 1940, Moses performed a study using recordings of the voice of an anonymous teenager. He found that it was possible to extract a character profile and a set of psychological traits, only through the examination of the voice, that were very similar to those obtained through a Rorschach test. In his book, Moses describes acoustic parameters of the voice such as range, rhythm, melody, etc., and he puts them in relation to several psychological aspects of the person. For example, he explains how rhythm prevails over melody in the speech of people with schizophrenia, or how the voice of depressed people contains descending melodic patterns that are repeated periodically.

**THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES TO THE VOICE**

The voice is, as we are seeing, a very complex phenomenon that can open many different doors into the psyche of people. This complexity is reflected in a large number of therapeutic approaches that explicitly use the voice as a vehicle for transformation. A possible classification of these approaches could be: 1) approaches that train the voice for developing certain qualities; 2) approaches that use a supposed transforming power that the voice has when it is produced in particular ways; 3) approaches that use the cathartic power of vocal expression; and 4) approaches that use the voice as an artistic mediator.

In the first category, we can include several disciplines that try to teach the person to utter her voice in new ways. The goal is to ‘improve’ or to ‘correct’ the voice following some criteria that determine what an optimal voice is. Examples of this approach are found in speech therapy, singing teaching, and speaking or acting techniques. In these disciplines, the client / patient is seen as someone who needs to learn a new skill.

In the second category, we can find several approaches or techniques that are based on the assumption that certain types of voice
emission, in themselves, have healing effects. Here we can find sound-based meditations (e.g., using the Om syllable), harmonic or overtone singing, reciting mantras, and other approaches to the voice that attribute different healing properties to vowels and consonants, such as the so-called ‘art of the word’, a therapeutic modality rooted in the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. In these approaches, the client/patient is considered to be a receiver of the healing effects of the sound and of the act of producing it.

The third category of approaches uses the voice as a way to obtain some sort of emotional catharsis. They are based on the idea that the voice is able to liberate blocked emotions. These techniques attempt to facilitate an intense and profound expression through shouting, crying or laughing. Here, we can find approaches such as the work with primal scream or laugh therapy.

The fourth category of approaches uses the voice as a mediating element in therapy, in a similar way as that in which paint or clay can be used in a therapeutic work with plastic mediators. In these approaches, the voice, especially nonverbal voice (singing, nonverbal sounds), is a channel of expression that is used to enhance the client’s ability to manifest their experience and expand their consciousness and their expressive possibilities. The therapist takes an active role in accompanying the client’s vocal production. For instance, the therapist may suggest that the client explore new ways of producing vocal sounds that the client will not usually allow himself, such as producing a voice of a lower or higher pitch than usual, which may have resonances with his relationship with his own masculinity/femininity. The therapist can support the patient with her own voice or with an instrument and, for example, improvise together a lullaby that is dedicated to the client’s inner child. Examples of these approaches can be Paul Newham’s voice movement therapy (Newham, 1998) or Diane Austin’s vocal psychotherapy (Austin, 2008), both of them psychoanalytically oriented.

**AN APPROACH TO THE VOICE FROM THE THEORY OF SELF**

The theory of gestalt therapy is, in my opinion, well suited to help us think about the phenomenon of the voice. Although no theory is able to completely describe reality, some theories can be useful if they guide us into that reality and make us look into new aspects that we had not explored before. My intention here is to open up different ways of looking at the voice from the basis of our theory. My purpose is to find ways of using the voice in psychotherapy that are consistent with the gestalt therapy method. I am not underestimating other therapeutic methods, but I think it is interesting to find out which types of voice work can integrate smoothly within a gestalt therapy framework, and which do not.

**THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STANDPOINT**

The phenomenological roots of gestalt therapy invite the therapist to focus on ‘what is’ rather than ‘what should be’. From this perspective, therapists attempt to bracket out their interpretations and preconceptions to stand, as much as possible, before their patients as they are. Thus, an approach to the voice that comes out from this point of view naturally invites us to listen to the client’s voice as it is, without interpreting it or attempting to make it different to what it
is. This does not mean that the voice cannot change - in fact, it changes constantly. It means that, with this approach, there is not a 'correct' or 'authentic' voice we must look for, neither a 'wrong' nor 'false' voice that must be removed. A person's voice, as manifested to us in the here and now, is a snapshot of who that person is in that here and now. Our therapeutic goal is not to change the voice for 'better' but to unfold its complexity and explore its nuances as a way to understanding the person's experience.

In a therapy session, for example, a slight tremble in a patient's voice when she briefly mentioned a brother who had died years ago, might be an indication that there are aspects of her grieving process still unresolved. When I pointed out to her that her voice changed when she mentioned her brother, the tremble became crying and this opened the possibility of talking about aspects of that relationship that were still present for her. Another patient, a young woman who had trouble connecting with her desire, was hesitating between two different directions that she could take in her life. I asked her to produce a nonverbal sound for each of the two options. She realized, just by listening to herself, how one of the options was not producing any excitement. The other did produce excitement, which she managed to suffocate very quickly. Both of us could hear this perfectly; in the second option her voice rose for a moment and became acute, but immediately fell to a lower pitch and a flat intonation. Noticing this opened up for us the issue of her desire, where it was placed and how she would not let herself feel it.

VOICE AND SELF

The voice has the same properties that define the Self as found in *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement And Growth In The Human Personality* (Perls et al., 1994): “Self is spontaneous, middle in mode [sic] [...] and engaged with its situation [...].” The voice as well is spontaneous. We cannot utter our voice in a totally deliberate way. We never know what sound will come out until it comes out, and once we are emitting sound (either spoken voice, singing, or nonverbal sounds) we enter a process of discovery and invention as we go, in which the emerging sound is partly beyond our control.

The production of voice is simultaneously active and passive. When we produce voice there is not only an active muscular attitude. We also hear the sound we utter, that is mixed with the sonic environment around us. It is a self-regulating mechanism in which the active emission of voice is modulated by the perception of the environment. It emerges in an engagement with the situation. We cannot access the voice in a way that is isolated from the present experience.

On the other hand, the structures of the self are also reflected in the voice. The voice is a privileged access door to the functions of Self, i.e., personality, id and ego (Perls et al., 1994). The personality function can be observed in the voice in many forms. We adopt tones of voice and inflections that we learnt from our parents and our cultural environment. We modulate our voice according to our self-image. Personality patterns that have become chronic in us and become a part of our secondary physiology have an immediate reflection in our voice. As mentioned before, the production of voice involves virtually the entire body and therefore muscular tensions in our body armor have an immediate correlate in our voice. A voice that is
systematically shrill, or nasal, or velvet-like, and always sounds like this regardless of context, may be the product of a chronically rigid muscular system. A spontaneous and natural voice is able to vary depending on the needs in a given context and it can become shrill or velvet-like depending on what the situation demands.

The voice also opens a privileged door to the id function. In a therapy session, for example, we can track what is pushing, where the client’s desire and urgency is placed, if we listen to the tones of her voice as she speaks. If the body is an entry point to the id function, as gestalt therapy states, then the voice offers an acoustic correlate of how the body is. The voice makes audible some aspects of the body that may not be visible. Sometimes it is easier to detect a held breath if we listen to the sound of the voice than if we try to watch the movements of the rib cage. The muscular response that occurs when a person contacts an issue that touches her emotionally may be more easily audible through the voice than visible if you look at her body.

The ego function is also reflected in different ways in the voice. When contact is interrupted, the voice gets modified and it loses spontaneity. When emotions emerge, the voice changes in different ways: it is energized, it takes a direction, it becomes explosive. When the person holds the emergence of emotion, the voice also tells us this. We may hear a retained, or hesitant, or falsely confident voice. The person’s voice when exploring the environment and contacting is different to the voice of post-contacting and integration. Our body posture changes and, therefore, also the voice.

As an exercise in group workshops about voice and emotions, I sometimes propose that participants pronounce neutral sentences with different intonations that denote different emotions for them: fear, affection, sadness, anger, etc. A frequent outcome of this experience is that some participants become aware of how difficult it is for them to express some particular emotion. Sometimes they experience that they try to express some emotion, but the others hear a different one - when I express sadness, the others think I’m angry.

**THE VOICE IN THE FIELD**

The voice is a contact-boundary phenomenon. In everything we have discussed so far in this article, there is one aspect of the voice that we have not emphasized yet, and yet perhaps it is the most crucial issue, at least from the standpoint of psychotherapy: the voice is fundamentally relational. We talk and sing not as much for us, but for the other. Our voice that, as I said before, is simultaneously active and passive, is regulated not only by the acoustic environment but by the relational setting.

The way we talk depends mainly on who we are talking to and under which circumstances. We could even say that our voice does not belong to us one hundred percent. We could call it an ‘intervoice’, the same way that our subjectivity can be considered an ‘intersubjectivity’ (Stern, 2003). Our voice output depends not only on us. It depends on who is with us right now, what we intend in the relationship with this or these people, how we feel in this environment, etc. Our tone of voice sends messages to others about the kind of relationship we have or want to have.
with them. Does my voice sound cold and sharp? Is there an invitation in my voice to get closer? Would I like the other person to guess my intentions through my tone of voice, so that I don’t have to make them explicit by words? Can I extend the volume of my voice and include a large group of people when I speak in public? Do I make my voice pitch higher so I resemble a child? Do I make it lower so I sound manlier? Do I give it a metallic timbre so I seem dangerous? How does my voice change depending on who I am with? How do I accommodate it to each situation?

As an example, I asked a patient to describe his voice and how he experienced it. We found an image for it. His voice was like a slightly elastic rope that bound him with one other person each time. This led him immediately to discuss the way he related to people. It was easier for him to keep one-to-one relationships. He felt that he had to regulate the tension within each relationship so the rope was not too tight or too loose. On the other hand, it was very difficult for him to talk to a group, because, among other things, he did not know where to throw his rope if there were many people. The use of his voice as a metaphor took us directly to his relational style.

All these questions have to do with the other. Interestingly, this point of view is not always found in therapeutic approaches that use the voice. Many of them tend to be rather individualistic. In my understanding, this is one of the most interesting pathways for research on the voice from the gestalt orientation.

An obvious consequence of adopting a field paradigm is that we also have to pay attention to the voice of the therapist, since it is also affected by the situation and it also affects the patient. All the considerations we have named so far about the voice of the client also apply to the voice of the therapist. In a therapy session, the voice of the therapist can often have a great impact on patients. I remember a video recording of a couple therapy session in which the therapist was Leslie Greenberg. It was remarkable how, at a certain point in the session, he slowed down the pace of his voice, he lowered the pitch and put more air into the emission. He began conveying a warm, almost hypnotic, sensation as he made increasingly risky interventions describing the couple’s unhealthy functioning modes. The tone of his voice seemed to hold the couple and soothe the partners while the therapist named challenging aspects of their relationship. In my own work, I have noticed that it is useful sometimes to use my voice for amplifying some feelings that the patient is expressing only incipiently: “When I hear you, I feel as if you were saying ‘enough!’” That “enough” pronounced with the proper emphasis, can impact the patient and make him aware of how he feels by means of noticing how he reacts to my voice and words.

CONCLUSIONS

I hope I have been able to transmit how central the voice is in the human experience. It is a phenomenon that encompasses a huge number of dimensions and tends to be hard to deal with in a conscious way. The approach to the phenomenon of the voice from the theory of gestalt therapy and the field paradigm has not been developed extensively, as far as I have been able to explore in the available literature. My intention is to keep working on these ideas.
In my view, the gestalt approach opens up many useful directions in this field. On the one hand, it encourages us to listen to the voice without judging it as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Rather, it urges us to turn our attention to the ‘how’, to what a person’s voice is telling us about that person and her situation. The field paradigm invites us to understand the voice as a field phenomenon in which we do not only think of the voice of a person, but also of the voice that the other is receiving. In other words, not ‘my voice’ but also ‘how my voice is touching you’. We are also invited to become aware of the therapist’s voice. On the other hand, the voice gives us an important reference for a therapeutic approach based on the idea of contacting. It provides moment-by-moment clues about the atmosphere of the session and to what is dominant for the client at each moment. In short, I believe unfolding the voice can be a very useful tool for our work as psychotherapists, even thought it is still a relatively unexplored field in gestalt therapy. I hope this article arouses the curiosity of the reader.

REFERENCES


Moses, P. J. (1954), The Voice of Neurosis, Psychological Corp.


Stern, D. (2003), On the Other Side of the Moon: The Import of Implicit Knowledge in Gestalt Therapy, in Creative License, Spagnuolo-Lobb, M. and Amendt-

David Picó-Vila is a gestalt therapist and psychologist working in private practice in Valencia, Spain. He trained at Institut Français de Gestalt-Thérapie. He is a classical singer and pianist and has a PhD in Computer Science (Natural Language Processing). He is a lecturer at the Polytechnic University of Valencia and a member of EAGT, AETG, NYIGT and AAGT. He is particularly interested in working with professional musicians, actors and artists, approaching expression of difficulties through gestalt therapy theory and practice. david@terapiados.net
“(Here is) my appreciation of Hitler; if Hitler had not come to power, I would probably have been dead by now as a good psychotherapist who lives on 8 patients for the rest of my life.”

~ Perls (1969, p.69)

A typically Perlsian provocation - but what is the meaning and benefit of such an appreciation couched in radical or extreme terms? It’s almost grotesque in its brutal compression, but under the discomfort of the statement isn’t Perls telling us something profound about the genesis of gestalt therapy and its uncertain evolution without the actuality of Hitler and WW2? Embracing this appreciation on the terms Perls gives feels like a high-wire act aiming at integrating the seemingly only depreciable (Hitler) but with the casualty of Perls’ seeming deprecation of himself in the process. Written well after WW2 and when Perls was in his 70s, this statement, while uncomfortable, seems clearly field-theory compatible and likely the result of time’s help in integrating the actuality of Hitler in Perls’ historic field.

What, however, of the ‘gestalt prayer’ with which Perls ends the introduction section of *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim* (1969, p.24)? This strikes me as totally lacking in what I would understand as a field perspective:

*I am not in this world to live up to your expectations,
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.
You are you, and I am I,
And if by chance we find each other, it’s beautiful.
If not, it can’t be helped.*

Criticised many times for referencing an individualist paradigm expression of living...
(e.g. Dublin 1977) it lacks the appreciative depth of field that inspires the first quotation, with all its discomfort. If written from an authentic field perspective, and with the benefit of the current stronger emphasis on the relational, the third line might become 'you are you because I am I'. Or, from a modern neuroscience one, even more radically, 'I am you and you are I'. Both these alternatives suggest appreciation to me in the inherent interdependence or interconnectedness they imply in contrast to the sad sense of isolation Perls’ prayer leaves me with.

Perls thus in the same publication seems to reference polarised paradigms. The prayer feels to me an immature - young - worldview in contrast to the stab at a radical wisdom in the Hitler statement. The latter, while not yet the real McCoy in terms of wholeness - a complete appreciation - engages me and draws me toward exploring the process and destination of appreciation, beckoning even as a goal of my life too, an arrival that could support embracing everything seemingly awful, even death.

APPRECIATING APPRECIATION

While appreciation amounts to a group of related meanings in the dictionary (gratitude, giving things their proper value, clear perception or recognition, an increase in the value of things, and critical notice or evaluation of something), in the lived sense I experience it as a sanctuary of kinds, an alternative dwelling place and refuge from my narcissistic bubble, but also not a place barring painful or difficult truths.

I’m learning to recognise when I do not feel appreciated or cannot appreciate something or someone, and to move away from personal relationships where adequate mutual appreciation has proved elusive. I am aligning myself to relationships where appreciation is a tangible embodied reality for me and where appreciative living is supported. When I experience appreciation I breathe more deeply, anxiety vanishes and I resound in the world, hearing and receiving the echoes of my living in the other beings I experience connection to. My mother joked when I was young about a mutual admiration society when any two others shared expressions of positive recognition, but I now see how a society of mutual appreciation is the real deal, the sine qua non of connected living - and that sadly, my mum, now very aged, hasn’t known this for herself as far as I can tell and struggles to appreciate and feel appreciated.

Appreciation is such a central facet of my life and health that I cannot ignore it in my clinical praxis, and have started to experiment with introducing it directly into my talk and work. In my clinical work with officers from West Midlands Police, and in my private practice with clients and supervisees, I am more and more finding that while I constantly inhabit the powerful paradigms that define our work as gestalt therapists, I also look for something my clients can directly resonate with - and that this something is often located in the dimension of appreciation, which I find can become a powerful shared language.

After my opinion piece for the UKAGP magazine (Autumn 2017) on the launch of New Gestalt Voices, it now feels authentic for me to write for this journal directly, as my UKAGP piece was an appreciation of the phenomenon of NGV entering the
field of gestalt writing and thus providing a second pole to BGJ. I noticed that I became appreciative of both poles (NGV/BGJ) in the reconfigured field conditions around writing, rather than just the one that I felt an immediate identifying with (NGV), and this motivated me to think further about appreciation in general.

Here I explore appreciation from a personal and clinical perspective, and discuss its micro-dimensions as part of inquiry, technique and ‘destination’ and how it might be advanced consciously in clinical work. I introduce my concept of ‘relational capital’ in support of maximising appreciation, and bring in some clinical vignettes for illustration. I want to identify the furthest reaches of appreciation in our intrapsychic and inter-human worlds, and whether gestalt therapy is a place where the phenomenon of appreciation needs greater recognising and realising.

I regard this as the start of an exploration of appreciation in the clinical setting, and I would welcome comments and suggestions about the merits of developing the theme further. In exploring this, I use the opposites to appreciate – depreciate and deprecate – fluidly, as I don't apprehend a great difference in their current use.

**APPRECIATION: TAKEN FOR GRANTED?**

Appreciation is absent from the core gestalt concepts that have led therapeutic direction for over half a century, and our founding text *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (hereafter PHG) makes only passing reference to the phenomenon. However, one or two tantalising mentions get through, including this reference to a polarity or opposite of appreciation: “What do you doubt about yourself? Mistrust? Deprecate? Can you reverse these attitudes?” (1973, p.195)

Gestalt therapy has evolved to embrace Buber's philosophy, and in evolving theory around ‘the between’ (Buber, 1965a) has developed the facets of the dialogic relationship, including the qualities of presence, inclusion and confirmation. These dimensions, also unnamed in PHG, have - it seems to me – obvious kinship with appreciation, but I feel that appreciation is worth a voice of its own within and beyond the dialogic aspects of our work.

Given that appreciation is so widely referenced in the traffic of our human exchanging for its commonplace gratitude dimension, I would argue we might now more embrace appreciation for its deeper meanings - grow it, court it, even cultivate this in therapy in the way we have been encouraged to “cultivate uncertainty” (Staemmler, 1997). Both uncertainty and appreciation may carry risks in their cultivating if we go beyond the gratitude aspect of the latter quality to embrace its more radical credentials. Those dictionary meanings of ‘giving things their proper value, clear perception or recognition, (making) an increase in the value of things’ suggest challenges to the status quo – or to those who may be unprepared.

Appreciation feels to me more potent – present - as a verb (in the experience that is *appreciating*) but is perhaps powerful both in ‘being’ and ‘doing’ modes, suggesting it's thus both journey and destination in the way that Yontef describes awareness (1993), another kindred spirit of appreciation.
In the end, as Lynne Jacobs has said, “All theory is personal” (exact source unknown but quoted by Leanne O’Shea in her lecture ‘Voices from the margin’, AAGT Conference, Asilomar, 2014), and I intend to ensure that my appreciation of appreciation isn’t the appreciation that dare not speak its name.

APPRECIATION IN CLINICAL WORK

STARTING TO APPRECIATE: THE APPRECIATION ATTITUDE

My interest in the complex phenomenon of appreciation ripened seven or so years back when, on completing a supervision training with Robin Shohet, we (the group) were introduced to ‘appreciative inquiry’, a widely used paradigm within organisational change methodology that embraces appreciating what is currently uncomfortable, as well as what we more easily accept or acknowledge. The model seems to me to have much in common with gestalt therapy and was developed in the 1980s by, among others, David Cooperrider. It helped move organisational focus away from seeing only problems to be fixed, to ways of asking questions and envisioning the future in order to foster positive relationships and build on the present potential of a person, organisation or situation. It includes seeing and celebrating ‘what is’ as strengths and assets, noticing small things that make a big difference, cultivating the capacity to deeply understand and approach difference with compassion, creativity, and wisdom - and embracing the mess. There is a focus on the unity of the system, and on the system being a mystery to be embraced rather than a problem to be solved, thus providing an attitude compatible with gestalt therapy, and from which appreciation can arise (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros 2008).

It thus sits well with me to see appreciation in its inquiring form as a good basis for the therapeutic alliance, which in my experience often needs a language beyond just curiosity and commitment. Appreciation offers an attitude from which to examine the process and content of the work, including the relationship with a client. Questions or observations about the appreciating or deprecating of aspects of the client’s current and historic field can yield valuable information about likely clinical work, but inclusion and sensitivity are needed at this stage. Here are a couple of interventions of different grades:

How could you begin to appreciate your accident? Would you imagine wanting to do that?

I know this could be heard strangely by you, and perhaps it is something that at this point you may wish to reject as alien to your thinking, but I was wondering if you’ve in any way found yourself in a position to start to appreciate - not in the sense of enjoy - such a difficult and painful experience?

These could surface all sorts of useful responses and provide valuable assessment material. Regarding commitment, however, I understand appreciation as manifest presence; it is the phenomenon of ‘showing up’ and intention to be in the therapy situation by both parties, rather than some other imagined ‘better’ option. Des Kennedy writes of mutually engaging in “a process of seeing, hearing, sensing one another, struggling to appreciate... what is going on between us” (2003, p.78). I like this sense that
appreciation is an attitude, a challenge, a risk even - that it is a process and a goal of being together right from the outset.

**DEVELOPING THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP: APPRECIATION AND AWARENESS**

Studying at Metanoia, it was a popular beef among us trainees that awareness isn’t enough - what happens next? And I was interested that Enright (1978) writes “the crucial problem with awareness gluttony is that as attention shifts to reaching for the next (awareness), it is taken from the full use and appreciation of the awareness that is already there.”

This helps me to separate appreciation from awareness, and suggests that appreciating is akin to digesting, that it is part of the supporting of awareness that is so crucial. One aspect of supporting awareness that I find crucial in early stages of therapy is over the issue of creative adjustments that are deprecated because of the difficulties they may engender in the current field conditions. Regarding this, Clemmens (1998) speaks of the need to appreciate more than the overt value of the undoing of a troublesome creative adjustment of dependency, in saying “I can only appreciate the impact of any client’s abstinence by appreciating what self-adjustment function the drug serves”.

This is appreciation as figure-against-ground, not allowing the view to become ‘figure-bound’ (Wheeler, 1991) but insisting on depth of field - appreciable depth. Here this can develop the client’s wider appreciation beyond the figural value of abstinence. In this wider appreciative context comes the possibility of confirmation, a process which is, says Dave Mann, “about confirming the client’s existence rather than their behaviour” (2010, p.183), supporting fundamental human worth beyond identifying conditionally (here, for example, only appreciating abstinence over ‘using’). Confirming the client solely through the polarity of abstinence would risk self-rejection via the deprecated erstwhile creative adjustment.

Confirmation can sometimes seem to me to belong to a core-self model and suggest excluding the field - the situation. I suggest appreciation is about attention to, and integration of, the totality of the situation, including acknowledging the prior lack of confirmation, the consequences of this, the support to move into a place of awareness and contact, and the presence of available opportunities in the current relational situation.

**APPRECIATION IN PRACTICE: EXPERIMENTS AND POLARITIES**

Concerning experimenting, and thus the ‘doing’ aspect of appreciation, researching this piece surfaced a polarity-pairing I had not been aware of through my reading to date, in discovering that Perls advocated an opposite to resentment other than that of guilt (1951, p.123) which had been the PHG-originated working polarity for my interventions around resentment until now: “Now go back to the resentments you expressed toward the person. Remember exactly what you resented. Scratch out the word resent and say appreciate. Appreciate what you resented before. Then go on and tell this person what else you appreciate in them” (1969; p.69).

This offers a powerful shift, if we are able to
make it, and it strikes me that this reversal is what is actually being modelled by Perls in his Hitler statement quoted above. As such, appreciation being in effect forced as a polarity in this way doesn't provide that ultimate in appreciative co-respondence, that wide appreciation that I'm suggesting might arise at the end of a phase of therapy or of a life in the 'being' dimension. Nonetheless, wide appreciation may have to be built partly from the sort of experiment Perls initiates above, whereby heretofore disowned or discarded aspects of the field - ego dystonic elements within our experience - are gradually embraced and integrated.

Challenging clients over their lack of appreciation does not always have to be via such violent means, and hence I have developed the idea I call ‘relational capital’ - the relational value that is implicit but often is lost when a client, or therapist, dismisses an aspect or aspects of the total situation which diminishes appreciation.

**RELATIONAL CAPITAL: MAXIMISING APPRECIATIVE POTENTIAL AND DEEPENING THE RELATIONSHIP**

**Vignette 1**
This first cameo, based on a synthesis of clinical experience, features a common negation of appreciative potential, named at the outset.

Client: *I had to do it, that's all; I had to visit him.*

Therapist: *Nothing to appreciate there then?*

Client: *How do you mean?*

Therapist: *If it's just “I had to” then there's no room to appreciate the meaning or elements of what you did, what it was like for you...*

Client: *Well it was horrible for me. My Dad was in this home and I hated going there, it upset me and I saw some dreadful things.*

Therapist: *And yet you did it.*

Client: *Yes, I did it to support Dad and no-one else was willing or able.*

Therapist: *Well that's different now -what are you noticing?*

Client: *Well, I appreciate that I did it despite what I went through to do it. Actually, Dad couldn't really appreciate me given his mental state at the time...*

Therapist: *Let's talk through what just happened, can we?*

Relational capital is inherent in any 'between' situation where the value of the depreciated or dismissed material remains latent and thus only a potential for appreciative relating. When accessed through dialogic relating and phenomenological enquiring this capital can then be released kinetically into the equity of the relationship, with resultant increased awareness and relational appreciation.

**Vignette 2**
This cameo brings the client-therapist relationship into focus as the source of unrealised relational capital and thus missing appreciation.

Therapist: *Thanks for the message about running late.*

Client: *I'm sorry I'm late, I didn't have any money and realised on the way and had to go to*
the cashpoint and now I'm late.

Therapist: You are; I appreciate that.

Client: What, that I'm late?

Therapist: I like you to have your full session time with me...I like you here on time!

Client: I hate being late, I'm sorry, it must seem rude.

Therapist: We're both sorry then, but I feel alone so far in appreciating your difficulty.

Client: I don't know what to say now; you don't seem annoyed.

Therapist: You chose to make sure you can pay me?

Client: Yes, of course I had to; I'd never come without the means to pay you.

Therapist: And you sent me a message.

Client: Of course... well that's normal, isn't it?

Therapist: Wow! And you're just concerned to deprecate being late...?

Client: Well, I thought that's what matters right now, being on time.

Therapist: Well, punctuality is something we can both appreciate easily I guess, but can you also appreciate your intentions and your actions in ensuring I'm paid and know not to hang around for you in the cold downstairs?

Client: Yeah, I guess so; I never thought about it.

Therapist: I feel like maybe you took those aspects for granted - and expected me to? Could you imagine that other people might neither message nor have the money at times?

Client: Gosh, really? I suppose so- I really value your support right now, I wouldn't want to just turn up cashless.

Therapist: And I'm feeling there's something else to appreciate now...

Client: Yeah?

Therapist: Can you imagine the impact on me of your open valuing of the work we're doing?

Client: It looks like you're appreciating knowing for certain that it helps.

Therapist: Sure; so how are you doing with having been late now? You still want to apologise?

Client: Well...no. I can see I chose to risk lateness rather than choose not to pay you, and that being late, while I don't like it, was sort of part and parcel of everything, of what we're doing. I don't feel like I have to distance myself from it now...

In this compressed cameo, I seek to support my client to a fuller appreciation of the immediate situation between us, and help liberate the relational capital contained in the initial apology in a way that first promotes awareness and links that awareness to intention and the mutuality inherent in our work. The erstwhile polarised characteristics of I'm late/I'm on time (wrong/right) are unified in a field perspective that includes our relationship. We could thus also regard this as a figure/ground piece in which the figure of lateness is steadily supported with missing
ground to achieve new meaning for my client.

The question of creative indifference arises in this cameo but, as the therapist in this situation, I am not authentically neutral to the thought showed toward me by this client who phones and also ensures he has money to pay me. It is possible I am invested in my client seeing things my way, but it is the relationship here that I seek to support.

Working to liberate relational capital is an idea I use with supervisees and which has proved popular with those needing support in helping to bring the therapeutic focus to the client-therapist relationship. The term ‘relational capital’ is a shorthand, therefore, for aspects of the between of a relationship that may otherwise remain invisible and unappreciated in the journey toward fuller appreciation, which I believe is so often the unspoken goal of therapy.

Realising the relational capital leads, in my experience, to appreciation manifesting through inclusion: “the forming of a relationship in which the other is valued as much as oneself, in fact as oneself, is a truly wondrous achievement” (Mullen, 1997). Mullen goes on to acknowledge the need for the mutual appreciation I endorsed earlier in saying “One (of a couple) may feel thwarted by the other’s lack of interest in what she or he wants, yet not appreciate, because they do not inhabit a mutual psychological space, that the other feels unappreciated too”.

**OBSTACLES TO HOLISTIC APPRECIATION: THE APPRECIATE/DEPRECATE TENDENCY AND SHAME**

“Splitting, denial and not taking responsibility are common when the unified field is not appreciated for what it is.” ~ Parlett (1997, p.29)

The journey toward a holistic, unified field perspective is at the heart of the appreciative paradigm I advocate, and appreciation can be brought into focus in clinical work directly through the therapeutic relationship.

However, as Vignette 2 above shows, clients will, where shame or splitting prevails, reject aspects of their total situation and eschew a full appreciation. Swanson (1988) writes of clients who “stuck in confluence (may have) histories of punishment for differences and who therefore may need a lot of time and support for the ‘appreciation of difference’” which is a definition Perls (1969, p.281) gives for contact.

The phenomenon of unipolar appreciation and thus unipolar depreciation—such as in the above-cited example around a client’s deprecation of their dependencies (Clemmens, ibid) is, I find, a major issue in clinical work. Cultivating appreciation by way of relational contact and differentiation toward an authentic bi-polar appreciative experience is a place where shame can easily manifest. However, my experience suggests that appreciative connection, brought into being by dialogic work, relational exploration, experiment and work to support recognition of the unified field amounts to a ‘stereo’ embodied experience lived as the opposite to the ‘mono’ of living in shame.

‘Support’ was an opposite of shame that I have been used to identifying (MacKewn,1997) but, while I still value this as a working model, I am now suggesting that appreciation is for me an opposite of shame in the sense of describing a place of being, a
dwellings place.

Since early adulthood, I have embodied shaming myself for my bifurcations - for taking two degree subjects not one (combined honours), and then taking two jobs or careers at once (teaching/piano-teaching, teaching/counselling, private practice/salaried therapy post), telling myself this was because I wasn’t good enough to do one thing properly. More recently through my own therapy, supervision and training I am now more able to appreciate my way of being in the world, and the creative adjustments I have needed to make, which I previously rejected. I value more of the bi-polarities in my historic and current field, and embody something different more often - a sense of peace and wholeness that doesn’t see me evaluating strands of my life separately. I now experience myself as living more in a condition of appreciation, rather than a state of shame.

As Dave Mann (2010, p.24) has written regarding holism, “We could embark on a mathematical calculation and rate ... relationships individually (but) if we did so the interwoven fabric of these relationships would be missed. (Instead) we need to stand back and look at how these threads interrelate ...in order to begin to appreciate something of the elaborate and fluid patterns created within our network of supports”.

APPRECIATION AND SPIRITUAL LIVING: BI-POLAR APPRECIATING AND THE INTEGRATION OF POLARITIES

If polarities have been acknowledged and integrated and the ‘doing’ of therapy largely over, appreciation can, I believe, arise as a state, a condition. Using words to try to transcend words is a well-acknowledged difficulty, but through writing on the subject I realise now that appreciation has a distinctly spiritual quality, a dimension of living often unacknowledged, deprecated or denied.

Writing about spiritual experience feels like another ‘coming-out’. I didn't expect this to emerge when I started. However, having practised Buddhism intensely for a period of my mid-life, I've known I've been seeking an integration of Buddhist philosophy and gestalt therapy, and that this process was advanced at the joint AAGT/EAGT conference in Taormina in 2016 when I attended a workshop on the subject.

However, it's in his analysis of the transcending of polarities - polarities as products of the ego function, the ‘ego-mind’ as it is in Buddhist teaching - by Ingersoll (2005) - that I feel that sigh of relief, that sense of something named and understood, the sense of an ending to my detective story and the certainty of something tangible for gestalt therapy:

“The dissolving of boundaries in final contact is the same as the dissolving of boundaries in spiritual apprehension. It is not a breakdown of the ego but a breakthrough from the ego. The ego is not obliterated but transcended and included in a greater awareness that one is connected to all human beings, to all living creatures” (ibid, p.144).

Appreciation for me in its ultimate form is this integration of polarities, a state resembling satisfaction but less withdrawn or sedimented, with a mindful presence and awareness. It stands as a metaphor for wholeness experienced and integrated, and is a dimension of living facilitated by
all aspects of dialogic relating. Appreciation amounts to lived field-theory, field-therapy, and is an alternative intrapsychic reality, while interpersonally being the seemingly unsung goal of therapy.

I'm moved by the expressions of acceptance I hear from people who have endured tragic things in their lives and by those who have found the wherewithal to embrace these things - accidents, illnesses, deep losses - and to move to a place of profound appreciation that touches the heights and limits of human experiencing to embrace the whole, including that which may have been at first only depreciable. This feels like my journey of choice too – the alternative seems too bleak and disconnected, albeit that I've a way to go.

Perhaps appreciation is a waking-up – the root of ‘Buddha’ in Sanskrit is ‘to wake-up’ - an enlightenment of sorts, and I will leave it to the vision of a poet, a prophet, to speak of the profound change that the dawning of appreciative connection brings to a life:

- We shall not cease from exploration
- And the end of all our exploring
- Will be to arrive where we started
- And know the place for the first time.

~ T.S Eliot (Little Gidding, from Four Quartets)

I gratefully acknowledge the help given to me by John Gillespie and Dave Mann in producing this article.

REFERENCES


Chris O’Malley is a gestalt psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer working in Birmingham. He has a background in teaching and music. He has an interest in emergence and intentionality, and hopes to soon complete learning Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Op.78, the main theme of which spontaneously manifested (unrecognised and previously unplayed) into his awareness during attendance at Gianni Francesetti’s UK workshop ‘The Psychological Field Co-Created Between Client and Therapist: A Relational Perspective’. He hopes to develop his interest in writing and has further themes he is currently exploring. chris.omalley@blueyonder.co.uk
As a Gestalt Practitioner in Organisations (GPO) specialising in financial market businesses, a large part of my work involves working with individuals and teams in trading, investment management, and sales roles. My focus is largely on helping people and teams to develop and grow their performance, and become more effective in the challenging and uncertain worlds they inhabit.

It is within the context of working in these highly specialised environments, characterised by extreme complexity and rapid change, that I have been applying practices developed through my Relational Organisational Gestalt (ROG) training. The ROG approach, developed by Marie-Anne Chidiac and Sally Denham-Vaughan of Relational Change, supports me as a consultant and coach to navigate these challenging worlds. In addition, use of the ROG models and philosophies enables me to help people, leaders and teams to navigate their own challenges more effectively. Finally, by introducing clients to these ROG concepts, within the context of their own world, I can facilitate them to adopt ‘sense-making’ practices, which can help them develop and sustain greater effectiveness in their own performance.

UNDERSTANDING PRESENCE THROUGH THE SOS FRAMEWORK

A cornerstone of the ROG approach is the ‘SOS’ framework. This is a relational model, which views a person’s world and the organisational system they are part of through the interconnected framework of Self, Other and Situation. This systemic context can be a small group, such as a family, or a much larger group, such as an organisation.

As an external practitioner, the SOS framework supports me to cut through the morass of complexity I encounter in...
each client engagement. This enables me to gain a deeper understanding of the interconnections of each person’s world and the system they exist within. A crucial aspect of this is how people relate to themselves and their environment through three interconnected lenses of Self, Other and Situation. Individuals who can create and exist within a strong and harmonic relationship with these three lenses are more able to be fully present. The more one is present, the more they can readily bring the best of themselves to their work and the challenges they face.

People in financial markets have two layers of extreme complexity to navigate, the organisational complexity, and the complexity they face in the highly volatile and uncertain environments of financial markets. The more present they are, the better they can manage these challenges separately and together.

When an individual, or a team, is fully present they seem to have more power, more energy, and a broader and wider perspective. They tend to make better choices, are more resilient to threat or setbacks, and are far more switched-on and ready to act. In the ROG perspective, being present is termed ‘energetically available and fluidly responsive’ (see Chidiac & Denham-Vaughan, 2007, British Gestalt Journal, for more details).

When one is fully present, energetically available and fluidly responsive, as a trader or investment professional, one is better at filtering, assimilating and making-meaning of the varied information and conflicting signals in the world around you (sensemaking). The ‘present’ trader is more able to optimise situations when right, and will suffer less in situations when wrong. It enables them to tip the scales in a positive direction.

The complete opposite is the ‘absent’ trader or investment professional. They may be physically present, but mentally they are absent. Absent individuals may surrender more easily to their personal biases and bad habits, or may be sloppy and easily disengaged. In addition, they are less cooperative with colleagues, collaborate less with other people and teams, and become harder to manage.

**THE SOS FRAMEWORK**

When we view presence through the model of the SOS framework, we understand it through three lenses: the Self lens, the Others lens, and the Situation (or context) lens. When the lenses are in balance and harmony, a strong overlap exists between all three. Where this overlap occurs, we term this as the area of ‘presence’; the conditions exist for the client(s) to be more readily fully present.

*(See FIGURE 1 & 2 on next page)*

We can contrast the Figure 1 to Figure 2, where the lenses are unbalanced - the area of presence is far smaller, or not there at all (absent).

Looking at the example on the left of Figure 2, there are many possible reasons that may be causing the ‘Situation’ lens to be smaller and less attached. These could include a poor organisational culture, misalignment between strategy and reality, inferior and poor IT systems, or perhaps an unaccommodating environment. When the ‘Situation’ is not supportive, I consider that the ground
is uncertain beneath a person’s feet. In an environment such as this, successful outcomes are far harder to come by, and much energy is expended for relatively little return.

Looking at the example on the right of Figure 2, the relationship between the individual (‘Self’) and ‘Others’ is highly challenged and stretched. A failure to engage with others successfully is impacting the individual and their situation. In this example, one may become less sure of one’s self, confidence suffers, and doubts can creep in. In a trading or investment environment, these individuals may fall back on biases and lazy thinking, they will be prone to poor decision-making and sub-optimal behaviours; they will be beaten before they even commence.
Being present is about so much more than just being in the right state of mind. The trader must stay present through each stage of the trading process cycle.

In my work, I introduce the ‘Human Trading and Investment Process Cycle’; this is my adaption of the ‘Gestalt Cycle of Experience’ contextualised for the trading and investment process. The ‘present trader’ needs to remain focused and engaged at all stages of a trade, whether it is a few seconds long or several months long.

The early part of the cycle requires attention to the unconscious signals from which one can infer meaning. Many great traders and investment professionals are highly skilled at listening to their intuition and work extremely hard to find hidden meaning, which enables them to reveal insights beyond ‘prima facie data’ and ‘beneath the headlines’.

The challenge moves on to the more conscious part of the cycle. Here the individual must structure the ideas into a trade, then execute, manage and see it through to completion and termination. Such is the nature of ‘risk and uncertainty’ that the termination phase may not always coincide with a favourable outcome. When the result of the action is a losing trade, then the ‘present trader’ is more readily available and capable of minimising losses.

The final part of the cycle often occurs beyond consciousness, and is about getting closure on a trade and moving on. Being present matters as much at the end of the cycle as it does at the commencement of the cycle. The ‘present trader’ can find it easier to get closure on a trade or idea. Failure to get closure can lead to more value being surrendered than was potentially realised on a successful trade or lost on a failed trade.

An example of failure to get closure on a successful outcome may be where the individual felt they ‘left money on the table’.

---

**The Human Trading and Investment Process Cycle**

Being present is about so much more than just being in the right state of mind. The trader must stay present through each stage of the trading process cycle.

In my work, I introduce the ‘Human Trading and Investment Process Cycle’; this is my adaption of the ‘Gestalt Cycle of Experience’ contextualised for the trading and investment process. The ‘present trader’ needs to remain focused and engaged at all stages of a trade, whether it is a few seconds long or several months long.

The early part of the cycle requires attention to the unconscious signals from which one can infer meaning. Many great traders and investment professionals are highly skilled at listening to their intuition and work extremely hard to find hidden meaning, which enables them to reveal insights beyond ‘prima facie data’ and ‘beneath the headlines’.

The challenge moves on to the more conscious part of the cycle. Here the individual must structure the ideas into a trade, then execute, manage and see it through to completion and termination. Such is the nature of ‘risk and uncertainty’ that the termination phase may not always coincide with a favourable outcome. When the result of the action is a losing trade, then the ‘present trader’ is more readily available and capable of minimising losses.

The final part of the cycle often occurs beyond consciousness, and is about getting closure on a trade and moving on. Being present matters as much at the end of the cycle as it does at the commencement of the cycle. The ‘present trader’ can find it easier to get closure on a trade or idea. Failure to get closure can lead to more value being surrendered than was potentially realised on a successful trade or lost on a failed trade.

An example of failure to get closure on a successful outcome may be where the individual felt they ‘left money on the table’.
Examples of failure to get closure on bad outcomes may include where the individual fails to understand what contributed to a bad outcome or where they sought to blame others.

Traders unable to get closure are unable to complete the cycle. Consequently, they may struggle to move on and could enter a negative feedback loop. This negative feedback loop undermines performance, and often dooms them to repeat mistakes. Compare this to individuals who get closure and can move on and enter the final part of the cycle. I term this the ‘space for moving on’; the more general term is the ‘fertile void’. This is where ‘time to think’ happens. In this space people can gain clarity, new perspectives, and can be creative. Freed from regret and fear, new thoughts and ideas emerge and spring up, and energy is restored for the next cycle.

**SUMMARY**

The ROG concept is proving extremely powerful in informing my organisational work, both in teams/groups, and when working with individuals in complex and challenging situations. The SOS model of presence is a powerful framework that enables the practitioner to navigate the complexity they encounter, and provides a lens for helping clients to gain greater clarity and insight into their own challenges.

The world is becoming increasingly complex, change occurs at a far more rapid pace than ever, and we are becoming less connected and engaged than ever, in a physical sense, from other people. It is within this context that a relational perspective is increasingly valuable when working with people and organisational systems. Relational Organisational Gestalt provides a powerful, holistic, and practical approach to working in a more relational way whilst building upon the core principles of gestalt psychotherapy. More details and insights into the ROG programme, as well as further resources, can be found on the Relational Change website at [www.relationalchange.org/rog-training](http://www.relationalchange.org/rog-training).

**Steven Goldstein** is a qualified Gestalt Practitioner in Organisations (GPO) awarded by the European Association of Gestalt Therapists (EAGT). He is a qualified executive coach, having achieved a Practitioner's Diploma in Executive Coaching from the Academy of Executive Coaching (AOEC), and holds an Executive MBA from Cass Business School. Steven's background includes more than 20 years working as a financial market trader in various senior roles at a number of major banks in London.

steven.goldstein@alpharcubed.com
When I started, I thought this article would be about me being intimidated by the paths walked by therapy greats – including gestalt greats – and difficulty finding my own relevancy in gestalt therapy. It’s a field that excites me. I love writing, and I’m a broadcast journalist of more than 25 years. Yet, both practising and writing about gestalt for ‘others’ has eluded me. Every time I tried to start, I would look at my life. I would also look at the vast amount of literature I have read and encountered. I would be overwhelmed by it all. How to deal with this?

I saw this journal and that it wanted to hear voices, rather than focus on academia. Doesn’t gestalt have a great oral tradition, a form of learning where knowledge is passed on by key others? The oral tradition is a way of learning that is infinitely richer and far more accessible (not to mention enjoyable) than the sharply, overly focused and increasingly regimented written form so favoured by general educational institutions. I also find that gestalt writings are so much richer – they grasp the essence of what, I believe, we all want to know. I wrote in and asked if NGV would be interested in an article about ‘bite-size gestalt’. Editor John Gillespie thought the idea was great. And here is the result. Nothing like I said I would write.

Over the years, I have written a whole bunch of material – about suicide, about family, about connection, about eating disorders, about ‘being.’ I ended up wondering what exactly gestalt was doing in my life. At heart, I feel I am a gestalt person, but one who was somehow not truly ready to show up and say “gestalt is what I do”. Full stop. I got it, yet I didn’t. I became stuck, paralysed. For those equally lamed or filled with doubt, perhaps we can walk this path of uncertainty together. The very instant I wrote ‘walk this path together’, a sadness rose from my chest and tears were not far away. How alone mine has been. Has the real purpose of this writing been to end this solitary walk?

I am now taking my own medicine, the very medicine I have given my clients, because
I am going through what they have gone through. Uncertainty. Part of my paralysis had to do with not knowing exactly how and where I will ‘do’ gestalt. I have had – and still have - considerable doubt about how to make a living in gestalt therapy. There is no clear path.

I love reading material written by Fritz Perls, the Polsters, Lynne Jacobs, Richard Hycner, Joseph Zinker, etc. They are names that are as familiar to me as they are, no doubt, to other students of gestalt therapy. They write well, they are graspable and I love reading their words which comfort me. Don’t ask me why. Or perhaps do. On the one hand, I feel so utterly qualified to deal with gestalt. Yet on the other hand, I don’t.

I read somewhere that every oak tree was once a small nut that held its ground. This is me. I feel like a small acorn still holding my ground. Ridiculous really. Perhaps my perception of myself needs contact with others. I grew up without parents and learnt to be self-sufficient. I can’t be an acorn. I am too old. I must be a tree but can’t see it.

For clarity’s sake, I feel I need to briefly explain some of my journey. Looking back, it was lonely, empty, with shattered dreams and much of life’s dark side. Inside was a powerful nugget of love for my family but that, through circumstances beyond my control, could not be lived. From age three, I grew up in a children’s home with my brother, after being born to teenage parents in post-war Netherlands. Step-parents, migration to Australia, poverty. Return to the Netherlands. My brother commits suicide. I had a grandmother who I didn’t realise until recently had gone crazy in the war. I don’t know my father’s family at all. I didn’t know until recently that the first twenty years of my life had been tough. Yet, I understood why my brother ‘left’, although I wish he’d taken another path.

I thought I was intact. After all, I was smart and ended up with a successful career as a broadcast journalist. Never mind that the journey was hard. Never mind that the words I spoke were not mine. But I felt in contact. Through a camera. My viewers were invisible to me. Clever. But I’m ahead of myself.

**FIRST CONTACT WITH GESTALT**

When I was 23, I was in big emotional trouble and sought therapy. The psychologist recommended several books, including ‘In and Out the Garbage Pail’ by Frederick S. Perls (1969). Did that blow me out of the water! Wow. Things I could do myself. I’m sure it wasn’t Fritz’s intention, but I taught myself to become a retroflector. Thinking I had found the Holy Grail, I became my own best counsel. I could be independent while common sense guided me. Little did I realise that I had cut off vital communication with significant others. But as a creative adjustment, it was brilliant and served me well. Except for a minor detail: deep relationships eluded me. Many people wondered why. So did I, in a way. But not entirely. I always wanted to revisit gestalt. I needed to.

**TRAINING IN GESTALT - COMING ALIVE**

While living and working in Germany as a broadcast journalist, I completed a five-year gestalt training course, from 2007 to 2012. I loved the training. I didn’t miss a
day, although I was often late. I still haven’t worked out why. I read everything I could get my hands on. Fritz Perls’ original book in both German and English versions. Brilliant. Genius. I was excited when I read this. I felt alive, relevant. I thought, this makes sense. It still does today. So many great books, so many great insights. A whole new world! I discovered much. My own inner existence. I encountered some very heavy figures that had been lurking in the background. During my training, and for a good year afterwards, I had several clients a week, I did 450 hours of therapy. I even held family constellation days, for the bigger picture. I had supervision. I was pleased with myself. The clients were happy, but I got tired. It all came to a grinding halt when I decided to permanently return to Australia to live in 2014. I landed in Brisbane, on the other side of the world, with a thud.

My practising hours were not recognised by GANZ, the Gestalt Association of Australia & New Zealand. The gestalt community was much smaller than I was used to in Germany. I felt support was not there. Over and over I heard, “There is no money in it; the world is full of psychologists, they have a financial advantage; you can’t compete”. The gestalt practitioners were open to me – but I was disappointed and restless.

GOING IN CIRCLES - WHAT NOW?

Despite being reasonably confident during my training, suddenly, I was full of doubt. I felt I needed recognition by government accredited bodies – top of the list was the Australian Psychological Association. Be registered there and a secure government subsidy awaits. I felt I could not stand on my own two feet. “I must do psychology. Getting that piece of paper would give me security and power!” I thought.

Little did I know, the journey that lay ahead would see Beisser’s paradoxical theory of change apply to me as it would to other mortals: I would ultimately have no choice but to accept what I had already become. Thanks to years of exposure to gestalt therapy and training, I was no longer the person I used to be.

Still blind to this change, I started psychology at a top university. I passed the courses but hated the study with a passion. I was in outrage. All those theories and hypotheses, with no conclusive endings, and statistics almost drove me insane. I can see the point, but can't that be learnt more efficiently? Inside I was screaming that many of the answers to human suffering were already there! I myself suffered at university, especially because of the one-way communication and rigidity of it all. Where was the human spark that I thought was at the centre of psychology? Not once did I get excited at uni. Not once! Sorry, I lie. Once - I will explain further on.

PEOPLE AS LAB RATS?

I was restless. I recall sitting in a child development class, sharing a table with four female students, all about 19 years old. The class was watching a video on disadvantaged children and how they turned out. Upon closer questioning, none of the students had a clue what a public (i.e. government / state) school was like. They were privileged private school students. They were surprised that I even thought their background was relevant. I thought, “What will they do when they are finished? Tick the boxes? Diagnose ADHD, Asperger’s, etc? Lab rat psychology? What am
I doing here?"

I recalled my gestalt days which, despite the pain that surfaced, were so deeply satisfying, so unexpectedly insightful and made me feel so alive. "What am I going to do?" I asked myself repeatedly. I felt life was passing me by as I read all those psychology books and PDF files, and wrote lab reports and essays I had trouble relating to.

The amount of work was immense. Sure, reading the material in my own time, at my pace, was to some extent interesting and useful. My back hurt as I tried to read the material. My eyes strained as I typed essays. I could not speed up as I read the vast amounts of compulsory material. I discovered my brain refused to function at high speed. Me, the straight A-student, found university way too cerebral. I had come to my senses and they were in revolt. Thanks, Fritz.

Gone was my creative adjustment of being a brainy smart kid who could introject to a fault and faithfully reproduce what others had said was good, knowledgeable and important. (Un)fortunately I had learnt to chew information, be discriminatory, and could only digest that which made sense to me. I feel a lot through my – now somewhat ageing - body. I was not prepared to abuse myself by studying 10, 12 or 15 hours a day. I only have 20, perhaps 30, maybe 40, years left. I couldn't sacrifice six of them to clinical psychology when I already felt I had learnt a great deal of what is going on.

STILL GOING IN CIRCLES

I found myself at a crossroads. The frustration phase. It's one thing to read about it in gestalt theory. It's another to experience it. Full-blown. For three years, I struggled with psychology. I tried full-time study. I switched universities. Each time I noted the census dates, and would sometimes withdraw as I shuddered at the prospect of being chained to a desk. I tried distance study. And still I hated it. I was several weeks into a semester of distance education, only a few months ago, when I broke my arm falling off a bicycle. I stopped – again!

But this time, I happened to have been enrolled in the topic ‘qualitative measurement for psychology’. A most horrid title admittedly – but it was a life-changer. I never completed the subject but I got out of it what I needed. It was the one course in psychology that gave me what I was looking for. The one time I got excited.

THANK GOD, A LIGHTBULB MOMENT

Qualitative measurement was the Holy Grail, and I think is a key discovery for the gestalt movement. The textbook - ‘Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology’ by Carla Willig (2013) - explains the different research paradigms and essential differences between quantitative and qualitative analysis and measurement. The difference between objective, science-based psychology and ‘the rest’. The lights went on. We were talking ontology. Ways of being. The role of subjectivity. The book
goes into phenomenology, realism, social construction. Bingo. I could locate gestalt within the different paradigms, paradigms that are recognised and accepted by others. I have work to do here, but it means that I can have confidence placing gestalt centre stage and add knowledge from other areas as needed. I am now greatly enjoying reading ‘The Discovery of Being’ by Rollo May (1983). I don't think he's a gestaltist but his views on existentialism sound awfully familiar!

I feel optimistic again. I have given up the idea of gestalt as a career. It's a calling. I feel no conflict with psychological science and can now focus on the gestalt teachings again. I am considering repeating gestalt studies in Australia so that I can deepen what I have learnt to date, and be more specific, clear and structured. I would enjoy talking with fellow students and teachers. I love the interaction, the theories, the authenticity of contact, or at least the inquiry into it. For me, it's like breathing. I have come to accept that I need gestalt, that the depth makes me feel alive. Isn't this what it's about? Isn't this what other people want too?

I am answering my own questions. The first five years I learnt about gestalt, I learnt about survival: surviving the absence of my family, dealing with my brother's suicide and all that went before it. I felt I had not yet learnt to truly live my own life. I was stuck in judgement and could not see my mother, until recently, in a different light. I believe I have missed a great deal. So how much can I now find out? It's exciting.

Horst Ter Haar, my supervisor in Germany, once spoke of his old black cat he got from an animal shelter. It was too scared to go outside but, one day, it somehow ventured out onto the back porch and now enjoys sitting in the sun every day. “That's a nice story Horst; I know what you are alluding to”, I said. “I am glad for your cat, but I am not going outside. It's not yet time”. I couldn't then. Five years later, I think it's happened that I can.

I am amazed if you have read this far. I feel I am talking to you as I write this, and I would be delighted if you were. I may never know this. I am almost done.

**BITE-SIZE GESTALT**

So what about the bite-size gestalt? The term came to me when, the other day, I picked up some old gestalt material from my course and found the case studies we had done. I was quite impressed with the quality of the insights. I went on my computer to see if I could find a copy of my case study. I couldn't find it. But I did find a folder with my client notes.

Those clients – who agreed to come for five sessions during training - provided a wealth of information, especially as I kept a log on some of them. My notes were better than I gave them credit for at the time. I needed the distance of time to be able to see the processes and interventions better and to acknowledge them.

The sessions were held in a simple room painted white, with two abstract pictures, one in red, the other in blue. I see them in front of me now. In summer, there would be flowers outside. In winter, there would be snow. The room was nothing special. Yet I recall one client saying “It is always so inviting to come here, even though there is hardly anything in the room”. I agree. I recollect one morning
when another client came in with his guitar so he could sing a song in front of a real person, which he hadn’t done in more than 20 years, to get over his nerves and shame. He said he felt safe with me. It was a lovely sitting. I learnt how sensitive guys can be.

I started reading more of my notes. They were short. Nothing like the formal lab reports at university. Just simple notes on how I felt and what happened in more or less detail, what I observed, some interactions, a couple of afterthoughts. A quarter of a page. One page. This was learning. Bite-size learning. For example, in supervision:

Client: “When my mother used to yell at me I would feel like a terrified rabbit and say nothing. I feel like such a coward! Why couldn’t I stand up to her?”

Anke Doubrawa (therapist): “I’ve never heard of a brave rabbit that took on a cobra snake and lived to tell the tale.”

I found a ten-page case study from my final year that I never handed in because I thought it was no good. It was a detailed process of me trying to find solutions and finding myself exhausted. There were notes on supervision, on how to get the client to work. Probably twelve months of work, succinctly described in a short document. It is very rewarding to re-read what I had learnt.

I found many bite-sized pieces of information. This wasn’t ‘theoretical aboutism’ - I had experienced what I learnt. That made the teachings valuable. I have many snippets: insights, discoveries, lessons, phrases and quotes. Many from contact with experienced people but also colleagues in my cohort. Others are my summaries, reflections and extrapolations of experiences with clients. The rest are reflections of my own life.

LOTs OF BITes

I have met some gestalt ‘heavyweights’ including Stefan Schoen. I was extremely moved when I read his book ‘Wenn Sonne und Mond Zweifel haeetten, Gestalttherapie als spirituelle Suche’ (1996). The other day, it dawned on me: yes, I credit him for certain key thoughts. Not publicly, but inside I carry key messages and what they resonated with. And in real life, was it not his manner and his attentiveness that made me feel welcome? Is that not exactly what we do?

I recall how one client, in a bad phase in her life, desperately needed a sitting. All the rooms in the institute were booked out. So we met in a café and talked for an hour over coffee.

Another time, another client turned up. It was a beautiful spring day: the sun was shining, the flowers were out (winter is long in Germany!). When he arrived, our connection was such that we decided to walk the park and held a sitting on the grass in the sun. I am not sure who enjoyed this more.

I remember another client, who had been coming for a year and a half, and who, to my surprise, burst into tears when I said I was returning to Australia. I found her another gestalt therapist she liked and said she had learnt so much, she was ready for other work. We took three months to say goodbye. I still remember her big smile.

Another client, a very intelligent jewellery artist, was short on money but made interesting jewellery. She paid me in earrings.
and a necklace. I still wear them regularly today.

I accept I am a lousy academic because I cannot produce a decent, fully referenced, academic paper. How comforting to hear recently that Isadore Fromm had the same issue! Perhaps I will work on that. But my gestalt teachers are inside me. Their learnings, mixed with my thoughts, are scattered in a disorganised way in paper and plastic folders, in my computer, in handwritten notes, in memos typed or spoken into my mobile phone, scribbled in the pages of my favourite books. Perhaps I will enjoy putting them together into a coherent work, one day...

I read in one of those notes that gestalt therapy isn't about building theories. How I fell for the lure of theory. Yet paradoxically, I love the way we discover theories in gestalt.

**DISCOVERING THE UNEXPECTED**

Here is one remarkably simple way to deal with projection. I wrote down my findings during an intensive process with Anke Doubrawa in Cologne. I was barely able to think, and needed to write my thoughts down immediately, or else I would forget what I had discovered. I could barely believe what I had written. Here I translate it from German to English:

*I don't know. Who are you?*
*I don't know who you are.*
*I know nothing!*

I have to smile today. Too simple, right? But it's true, and it was hard won work. I do not know who is in front of me. I welcome my clients. I recognise, however, that I need to do more work on myself, but I no longer struggle with academic envy. I have also realised that, as a journalist, I would love to take gestalt findings to the general public. Fritz Perls said (somewhere... help, I can't reference. So what?! Share it anyway!) that gestalt therapy was too good to be reserved for the ill. I believe people are screaming for different answers. That is why I am prepared to undertake more gestalt training. To find the words that are needed for a broader audience.

This is the first time I have ever published my written material. I am pleased that I have, yet I shrink as I think of someone else reading it. I am very grateful to this journal for openly stating that they seek out writings from students and other gestalt interested people 'who are not finished'. It has taken the pressure off me to produce a scholarly, heavyweight piece that I believed I needed to acknowledge me. This pressure would deny me the voice that so keenly and desperately wants to be heard.

I will finish with this poem:

_Absence is the bridge between us._
_I hear you whisper, all is well._

The first line is the title of a beautiful and moving book edited by Gianni Francesetti. The second line is my response. It was written in seconds, but took multiple millions more to create. I think of my brother Jos. RIP. May everyone be able to hear their own whisper.

Special thanks go to my former gestalt supervisor in Germany, Horst Ter Haar. He sat with me, so that I didn't need to feel that godforsaken abandoned feeling that haunted
me from the past. I didn’t know how present Horst had been until recently. He said he sometimes wondered whether he could actually help or not. Horst, if you read this, seven years of talks with you have left their mark.

**REFERENCES**

Francesetti, Gianni (2015) *Absence is the bridge Between us. Gestalt Therapy Perspective on Depressive Experiences*, 2015, Instituto di Gestalt HCC Italy


Wil L has a BA (Communication) from the University of Technology in Sydney, majoring in Philosophy in Modern Culture and Advertising. She was a news reporter, moved to Europe, where she went on to become an international news reader and TV and radio current affairs host. She completed a five-year gestalt therapy training in Germany in 2012. Wil’s interests include suicide, despair, depression and the way out. In addition to gestalt, Wil is also trained in, and has held workshops on, family constellations to help clients explore complex, unspoken relational matters. Wil would like to take gestalt to the broader public and plans to tailor her writings to provide a taste of it to those who are likely to benefit from it. She is enrolled in post-graduate creative writing and has plans to continue studies in gestalt with an Australian institute. [wlgestalt@gmail.com](mailto: wlgestalt@gmail.com)
Many threads are on the ground before me. I pick one up, lick the tip, look to the eye and focus. The thread is midnight blue. I step home to weave my story.

**THE MIDNIGHT BLUE THREAD**

I begin with imagination, an image I can’t quite see. A child who looks like him is smiling up at me, a girl with his hair. As a girl, these daydreams were my solace. Now they are tinged at the edges, veiled and sad. Something of too little too late. I really daren’t dream of that. The blue cord weaves to memory. I feel relief, yet it is still complex. The 80s films we watched together as children that I know off by heart, my brothers’ jokes at dinnertime, the smell of her clean linen. I think of my grandmother’s cookery. I repeat her movements like a mantra, fold, brush butter, fill pastries. I return to something of ritual as if I had lit a candle. It is hard work and yet my hands are familiar in this movement. This is a step home. I feel connected and I can fill the house with nourishment. I think of holidays, a wide flat beach in Wassennaar, the Netherlands, flaxen and pitted, blue bins marking the expanse graphically. I breathe, hear his tinkling piano music and laugh, his light bright blue eyes. I see her face, still young but somehow always older than me. All the lost loved-ones. I place my feet upon the twisted threads. My twisted threads to home.

**THE OAK BROWN THREAD**

I sit down at my table to write. The table is wooden and imperfect. I found it on the street outside and I gave it a home. The thread is brown like old Dutch oak. My friend Isabella said to me years ago, “You make family wherever you go”. Is family home? I try to think now practically: a home is a building with four walls and a roof. There are some belongings inside, some bought, some received, some inherited. It’s enough. It keeps the rain out, a shroud has no pockets. I look at the wooden armchair in my apartment, made from old Dutch oak and inherited, and I know I am stoic and resourceful. Generations
of women who survived. The thread travels onwards. I think of his apartment, present, ever-standing, safe, the large tree proud and perfect outside his window, and I feel the support of him, the scaffolding of his body and how I wouldn't have got this far without him. A man who stands like oak. And I step on alone.

THE SUNLIT YELLOW THREAD (THE BACKSTORY)

My eye falls to this story's beginning now that sweetly lies resting upon my apartment’s wooden floors. As I write this, I am here in Paris where I live. Something in me is renewed each year and views summer days through my eyes as a child. There is that sense of a six-week summer holidays stretching out. A seeming endless amount of time disappearing into the horizon. Back then, this was positive. Now, there is an acid throwback of slight dread. It is the time of the yearly Paris exodus, as les vacances ensue. As I remain, I feel the chill of the void. My solution to this is to give myself projects, the kind that keep my hands busy and my mind at rest. This summer it was interior design. This was also a very practical need – it was easier to think of what I didn’t/don’t need in terms of basic necessary furniture. And yet, my interior design project rapidly climaxed in the purchasing of a kilim. I bought said kilim from, I think, the only unfriendly Middle Eastern man I’ve ever met (and I am related to several from that part of the world). I loved the kilim but disliked him, so I performed an odd sort of exorcism of him as soon as I arrived back in my apartment (by exorcism, I mean lighting a scented candle and hoovering). I look at this kilim-carpet now as if looking through a kaleidoscope of moving gestalts. The colours waver in patterns. As I stare, I return to the childhood homes where there was not just one carpet, but carpets in excess, and decadence. They were not reserved only for the floor, but were put upon tables and hung upon walls. They were rich, opulent and full of deep colour, thick texture, woven intricately like our stories that we swallowed deep with the equally rich and opulent food of my father’s family. This carpet before me is a thread from my past. We weave our stories, a step to home, to soften the touch to ground.

THE TERRACOTTA BLOOD THREAD

The thread turns deep burnt red and my father tells me of the deep red earth of Africa. I know he misses the earth of his childhood, the open expanses. He says the word Africa, sounding out each syllable, “Af-ri-ca”, with relish and a Swahili accent, which he spoke in Nairobi where he grew up. My father was raised in Kenya yet he is an Armenian. The thread continues back a generation. My grandmother grew up in Addis Ababa and can speak Italian like a Napolitan soldier from the regime, due to the fascist occupation of Ethiopia in the Second World War. I speak Italian too and this makes me laugh each time I hear her guttural, joyful accent. Her parents sailed there in escape, from Eastern Turkey, via Beirut; the Coptic church opened their arms to Armenians, being fellow Christians. My paternal grandfather lived in many places – the Sudan, Khartoum; Egypt, Alexandria; Greece, Athens and Syros, having been forced to leave Turkey in genocide, before arriving in the UK and eventually settling in the US. Meaning half of me, if we can be so precisely divided, comes from a people who were forced to leave their home, the then named Constantinople or Smyrna, and Aintab. Imagine being forced to leave your
home. Forced to leave and to die along the way because of some kind of difference. I think of the 65.5 million forcibly displaced and 22.5 million refugees leaving their towns, their places of worship of whatever sort and their stories, the woven tapestries of their lives. When man draws lines in the earth, tell me, where are we free to step? It's happening now and every day, political decisions and ineptitude leaving us homeless... in the case of Grenfell tower, homes burnt blackened. My family's earth is stained with blood red. I am proud of the blood red thread, the terracotta earth – it pains me that they say this is a lie.

THE DELFT BLUE THREAD

I find my mother, she is Dutch / Irish / Scottish: beautiful, freckled, blue-eyed, impish. I latch on to her culture too, being practical, recycling, riding bicycles. My tall, large-breasted physique is fitting, yet I am dark-haired and other-nosed and not quite right there either. My brothers and I support the Netherlands in football (in full bright orange attire). We are in a Dutch bar in London surrounded by many seemingly cynical Dutch supporters with blond hair and blue eyes. It occurred to us, that we are supporting Holland but with all the passion, zeal and hand gestures of Middle Easterners haggling in a souk, holding on to the last painful second - we aren't realistic enough. I should stop. I am playing with the stereotypes that strangle me. I am trying to be whole and yet the map of the earth covers and slices my body. For I know I am not able to belong if belonging is about a nation. I can't ever be from only one place. A sense of nationalism is quite lost on me and has been for as long as I can remember. I rather regarded the cultures I am from like a child in front of a pick-and-mix stand, helping myself to a bit of this from one and a bit of another and so on. Diverse, yes, and also confusing and a long story. I don't know any other Dutch / Irish / Scottish / Armenians – except my brothers. If home is about belonging, I don't really, anywhere.

THE POMEGRANATE RED THREAD

I am not the only mixed drink cocktail or mongrel dog. There are many, and more and more as globalism grows. I wonder if the very idea of nationalism needs to be more fluid and encompassing for this. Could nationalism, as it is, be understood as one big fixed gestalt interlaced with many introjects? This is the knot, the larger question. How can we define home with so much scattering of people? Can home be place bound? For me, it's about something finer than that. I see these threads as traces of lines drawn across the earth, people marching across sands. It is sad that there are few traces of Armenians in these places that they were forced to leave. And, as the sands can move over the dessert, lines disappear by the breeze or wind. Tides suck and sway the water, sands at the shore carrying it here and then there again, the earth washed and carried by the river. The word ‘diaspora’ is Greek, meaning to scatter. I can find a sense of some home in that word. We are in flux. Home too needs to adapt to the subtle changes. “On those who enter the same rivers, ever different waters flow” ~ Heraclitus.

THE CORNFLOWER BLUE AND LOBELIA THREAD

My family is scattered like a bowl of rice fallen, springing off in many directions as the grains hit the floor. The next generation, we
(my brothers and I) grew up in London and my cousins in San Francisco – one now lives in NYC. Whilst visiting Paris this summer, she stayed in the apartment of an Armenian family, a friend of a friend kind of thing. This apartment is special, and we, two daughters of the diaspora, feel like we are returned to some kind of Armenian mothership, the pulsating womb itself.

Deep red pomegranate models and motifs – old ingrained and embossed books in Armenian, Turkish, French, English – musical instruments lying about waiting for fingers, a large piano, and I can almost smell the deep scent of cinnamon. And of course there are carpets, carpets everywhere. We laugh at its almost clichéd Armenian-ness. But we are sprawled on the carpets drinking French wine, talking art, family, life with my cousin, playing with her daughters, and I feel at home and the closest I’ve ever felt to her. New life and cornflower blue and lobelia threads appear in my hand, bright and hopeful as my nieces, as if I am being given the seeds of meadow flowers. They are here and the sounds of Paris’s city symphony are amplified, exquisite and joyful. I spend much time with them (this and each summer in Paris) and each time Paris becomes more my home. The volume fades as they leave. Paris feels empty and grieving. Even the August sky turns grey. The rain is that kind of horizontal and I am a heroine from a romantic English novel, sad and in keeping with my environment. I am lucky to have a rich home within my family; I know this is not the case for all.

**THE CUT OR ABSENT THREAD**

I listen to her voice, simultaneously deep as if from the dark belly of a whale and light, and as wise as a celestial being. She sings “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long way from home”. Home. I write about home, questioning whether I know what it means to be at home. Perhaps because feeling at home is something I rarely felt until I began to train as a psychotherapist. I have tried to make things mine but always sensed a transience, that the bottom could fall out. Things will always die or leave, that’s the way of things. Loss is mine though. I know that. Loss is part of my home. The curse of a large family is the many funerals. Grief is a part of who I am. A welt. J tells me a story – he is interested in mythology. It is the myth of the ‘three Parcae’– three beings who control the thread of life from birth to death (‘The Parcae’, Alfred Agache, ca 1885). Each time somebody dies, *Morta* cuts a thread. I try to reach those threads. You cannot touch someone when they have passed. I cannot touch them now. I move on and there is a longing. Both hands outstretched in reach for a place. Homesickness is existential, a part of who I am, a longing for something. I search
for connection to others. I don’t want to feel the icy wind of aloneness. It is complex. My cousin sings Armenian songs of returning to a homeland. The absence of home intrudes and is operating both metaphorically and literally. The homelessness I see each day in Paris preoccupies me – it pierces my heart. The Smiths sing “I never never want to go home because I haven’t got one...”. I imagine it’s something like being orphaned. So many of us feel fragile and alone.

**THE SAND COLOURED THREAD**

As a younger person, I was filled with dreams of travel, I liked to wander and explore. I feel differently now, no longer possessed by a spirit-wind pushing me on to leave like the women in ‘Chocolat’ (Joanne Harris, 1999). I know what Isabel Allende meant as she writes “I always keep a suitcase packed” (‘Paula’ 1994); I was ready to escape even if only to the books quivering upon the bookshelf or incessant daydreams of the future life I would lead. Perhaps we can only know the meaning of our homes if we leave them. I’ve lived in four countries and I feel closer to England after this – I appreciate more where I grew up, its sweetness and honour. This summer I watched (and joined in) with nephews and nieces building sandcastles; I understand their satisfaction, having built something up, to then crush the sandcastles in with their feet. Some things need to be destroyed or, less violently, let go of to build the home we want to live in. I lost myself; therapy and becoming a therapist has been a return. I walked many different ways to return to myself and make within me a home.

**THE THREAD IS CRIMSON**

I touch my belly. Fertile. Woman. If I have a child, my womb will be a home. My arms can protect, my body, fight – a woman warrior. I link the French word ‘chambre’ to the English ‘chambers’, and think of the heart space and wonder if the heart can be a home we can reside in wherever, regardless and with reverence. The thread swells blood red. My body-self is my home. How I trashed this house as a younger girl, smoking cigarettes and not taking care. I think of the global warming crisis and how we are not taking enough care of our environment – home, our earth. I sigh.

I like to write, I like the space for thought, the slower pace, the exacting precision of choosing words carefully. Having time to express myself – it feels like a bubble bath of luxury. Returning to this writing is a home, a place where I can hide in the valley. My breathing settles and I have all that I lack. It has been a safety, a shelter since I was a child. On dark days, I bring my journal with me. I place it on my table and just knowing I can write calms me. It is the root chakra connecting me to earth and myself, my return.

I speak to my therapist about the image of a fox perfectly curled from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail, safe at home, like in a nest. She says she would like to put some feathers in the nest and I appreciate this. As therapists, we build a safe haven for those who have perhaps known little of a safe home. A nest they can return to. A place to yield into and surrender. With new clients, questions around stable homes are asked on assessment forms. I think of the building
I give therapy in, its high spine and ancient walls, as if a well for tears, in the centre of Paris, like a jewel in the midpoint of a crown. I am thankful to my supervisor for giving me a home to work here in France. Knowing the feeling of home is important. Getting grounded, rooted, putting seeds in the earth so that they can grow, building something. I am trying. Moment by moment, home is here, I tell myself. Like Luke Skywalker (think Yoda’s voice), I was ‘always in the future, never his mind on where he is’. Being present little occurred to me. I think of the present moment as a hut on the cliff face – there may be wind roaring or a tide menacing threat, but it can be a retreat, a safety and a freedom.

Here I am at home. I place my hands together in prayer position, in faith and trust, feel my breath on my fingers, my heart beating beneath my skin. In this moment I am alive, I am breathing – I kneel and remember humility and grace. My heart is still beating. Here is home.

Gabrielle Anaïs Tekerian is in her first year of her master’s in gestalt psychotherapy at the Metanoia Institute. She lives and practises as a trainee psychotherapist in Paris. gabrielleanaistekerian@gmail.com
IN DEFENSE OF BEING A JERK
By Karla Morse

Just gonna stand there and watch me burn
But that’s alright because I like the way it hurts
Just gonna stand there and hear me cry
But that’s all right because I love the way you lie
I love the way you lie

When I was a young teen, I spent a lot of time crying in my room, writing in my journal. Over the years, I found myself trying to identify where I felt the hurting. I was trying to figure out exactly where it hurt because my pain felt so inexplicable and hard to grasp, yet I was aware of its physicality. That was a decent training ground for learning about gestalt therapy. I sat with a feeling and explored it with a curious detachment. Just where was this pain located? How did it turn into words in my journal? It was all interesting.

Then I grew up a lot and got polite by necessity, and I began to move more quickly through my feelings and physical experiences. Yet, through the years, I’ve had a growing awareness. Although I am a mental health therapist specializing in treating gender dysphoria, have always been liberal in politics, volunteer and give to charity, have spent most of my life in the company of multicultural and educated people who are also doing the work of human service and activism for marginalized populations, despite all of that, I have become aware that I am often not a very nice person.

I am almost certain that most people in my life think I am a nice person. I believe this to be true of myself too. I found a morbid curiosity in shining more light on myself and seeing that I am often, actually quite often, a big jerk to people. I think I always suspected it and then quickly told myself nobody’s perfect and moved on. It took a long time for me to learn to hang out in the moments where I was being a jerk and to let that jerk speak.

When I did that, I saw something quite upsetting and profound. I realized that I am complicit in the system that perpetuates racism. In short, I am a racist person and I didn’t know that about myself.

I'd like to share with you three occurrences in my life where I opened myself up to some harsh reality and some fertile ground for growth.

**FIRST OCCURRENCE**

I was in a committed relationship with someone and we owned a house together. I was seeing a therapist and trying to figure out why I was so miserable. Over the course of therapy, I figured out that I was pretty unhappy in this relationship so I made a decision.

I decided to stay in the relationship and do whatever I needed to do to make it work. I listened to myself. I really didn't want to leave my house. I didn't want to move again. I didn't know where I'd go. I didn't want my son to have to move again or change schools. I didn't want to lose custody of my dogs, and I wanted to maintain stability in my life after some hard years. I let myself whine and I decided that to stay would be easier. I didn't want to do any more hard things.

The moment I decided to stay, I became suddenly aware that I was going to leave. I became curious about this certainty becoming sharply figural after months of not having any idea of what to do. I realized that doing what I needed to do in order to stay would mean embracing the things that were causing me misery, and I did not want to do that.

As a mental health therapist, I knew that my relationship was unhealthy and was not going to change and I knew that leaving was a self-affirming choice. I had let it go on for years like that.

As soon as I let my jerkiness speak, I found clarity. I made a decision. That decision led to my knowing what to do. I needed to have a tantrum and see what that freedom of expression offered me. My therapist was supportive of me when I wanted to stay and she was right along with me when I was ready to go.

Gestalt is often paradoxical, and I delight in this. Deciding to stay led me to be ready to leave. The second occurrence was a bit different, in that it rolled out with my awareness and attending to the process occurring along with the situation.

**SECOND OCCURRENCE**

I attended a meeting where someone asked that we introduce ourselves with our name and preferred pronoun. Now, I am a therapist who specializes in treating gender dysphoria. This would seem to be a no-brainer for me, but what's this? I realized I was having some sort of reaction to this request.

I attended to myself and tuned in to my thoughts and body reactions. As I allowed the awareness to deepen, I found myself irritated and frowning. My inner jerk had something to say. I decided to let myself be a jerk about this, but I wanted to do it in a way that wouldn't hurt anyone. I mean that I didn't want to just go ahead and be a jerk at this meeting with the person who made the request. I wanted to mindfully whine and complain about this request, and I thought this would be hurtful to that person.

I also realized that I didn't want to do this all in my head because I wanted to hear the words I wanted to say, not just think them. I honestly didn't know what meaning the
irritation had and I wanted to find out.

I decided to ask someone to process my thoughts and feelings with me over lunch. I asked one of my colleagues if I could talk to her about it and she said yes. I gave her the background information and I realized that along with the irritation was an urge to meet the other person genuinely, rather than continue to deny what my real reaction was because a therapist who specializes in gender issues shouldn’t feel that way.

This is an outline of how that whole situation played out for me:

Initial reaction: They want everyone to say pronouns so I’ll do that because it’s good to do what people ask for when it’s easy enough to do. The world needs more understanding of gender variance and this will help.

Secondary reaction: I feel irritated and self-conscious about identifying my pronouns as a cis-gender person. It feels unnecessary, pretentious, and feels like pressuring others to be a social justice warrior. I’d like to be nice to the person who asked because I like them, but I don’t like to do things I don’t understand just because I like a person. I get resentful. I feel pushed around and pressured.

Third reaction: I believe that I am truly an ally for gender-variant people, but I don’t feel like an ally right now and I don’t know why. I don’t feel good about myself.

Question: I would like to do this because I care about the person who asked, but I need more rationale. How can I get the rationale that feels satisfying, if there is one? I would also like to be an ally and if I’m unwilling to be one I would like to know what is in my way. I don’t have a problem using anyone else’s pronouns so why don’t I want to say mine?

Here is where I requested my classmate’s help and she sat with me as a willing explorer and observer. She worked with me on going deeper into my feelings of irritation, the need for more rationale and my sad confusion. I shared that I was furrowing my brow, tensing my back and clenching my jaw. She elicited further verbalization of my need. I explored my experience of ‘I don’t feel like it’.

Conjecture: I need to know how saying my pronouns is helpful because, if this is a rule of a meeting, I don’t feel like doing it, but I will, but only at this meeting and I’m probably not going to do this, ever, anywhere else if I feel this way.

Brainstorm: What is a good way to get the rationale and how can I ask this clearly? How can I be assertive and not retreat into passivity or hold my aggression in so much that I retroreflect it?

Role play: Asking different people, what words, what way to explain my need? What body posture? What tone of voice?

Action: I looked for the source. I found the person who made the request and asked, “I heard your request and I was wondering if I could ask you about clarifying it. (permission received) I’m wondering how it helps you if everyone else identifies pronouns”.

Their response: They explain that when someone gives pronouns without being invited or asked, they immediately know it’s a safe and welcoming place to be. A place where they already belong without having to carve that out for themself.
Immediate and strong reaction: *I want to provide that to this person and everyone. This is a way I can be an ally by using my privilege to open a space. I am all in. This makes sense and it feels like a ‘me’ thing to do.*

Integration: *Why didn’t I already know this? Am I dumb or a jerk? No, I didn’t know what I didn’t know. I am always learning. I am proud of myself for being curious and using my resources and courage to work through this.*

Ongoing: *I do this in my support groups and as of now just in places where I know there are gender-variant people. I would like to expand this into other places because there are always gender-variant people in every space.*

Lingering doubt: *I don’t want to be obnoxious about it though.*

Resignation: *Let’s do this again. Where are my supportive people to hear me be obnoxious?*

"My quick retreat into my introject of being nice has led me to shortchange my growth. I found, in my uncomfortable experience of lingering in the place of being a jerk, that I was feeling different. More present, more willing, more humble, more powerful, more loving. More of everything.

The third occurrence cemented a profound lesson for me - that I had no ready process in acknowledging and dealing with my own racism - and this lack, for me, became an instant priority.

Where me being a jerk was the trees, my racism was the forest. And I was now able to see it.

**THIRD OCCURRENCE**

There was an occurrence in my therapy class where a woman left early because she didn’t feel well, and I took her leaving personally. I shared with the class that I was displeased with her choice to leave. I came up with the idea that I didn’t like when she left because I hate being abandoned, and when people leave I tell myself they don’t care about me.

As it turns out there was something I needed to face.

She shared her reaction to what I was saying. She said she was experiencing racism and it was coming particularly from me.

**WHY HER?**

This time the impetus to be able to explore this didn’t come from me. My initial reaction was shock, denial and anger.

I was riding home in the car with my colleague from The Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia, and my colleague gently asked me “How did you feel when *she* left?” with the emphasis on “she”. That struck me silent. I needed to let go of the neat story I was telling myself and really let this sink in... why her?

She is a person of color. Is it because of that?

It was a good question and it was almost impossible for me to think of why that would make a difference in my reaction to her. I had been raised without overt racism, in fact, abhorring racism, being offended by it and never acknowledging it as a thing my family or I would ever engage in or tolerate.

To be honest, I still find it very hard to allow this particular part of myself to speak. I
have a solid as concrete introject that it is completely not okay to talk about. It's not even okay to think about. I became aware that it was vital in this moment to take a look at my own racism and allow it to surface, to be verbalized and to be acknowledged. I didn’t know how to start a process like this.

My kind and caring coworker was willing to be patient as I struggled. Here’s how the thoughts surfaced as I allowed them: This person must not care as much about GTIP because she left. She doesn’t take this work as seriously as I do. I am better than her at this. I am more committed. I would stay in class even if I was sick. I know how to learn something better than she does. I care about our classmates more than she does.

It’s so hard to stay with this because I have a great deal of shame about it. It’s hard to write these words. I was self-righteous and judgmental, and, truthfully, it was just with her. Any other classmates did not bring up this strong a reaction.

I decided at this point that I have a lot to learn about racism. I also have a lot to unlearn. I have to learn more than I ever dreamed. I have got to pay attention to how I dismiss people of color and their experiences. I am not at all in touch with my privilege or my racism. This came crashing down with the gentle question, “Why her?”

Zwicky coined the term ‘frequency or recency illusion’ in 2006 (‘Why Are We So Illuded?’ Stanford University) to describe the experience in which a concept or thing you just found out about suddenly seems to crop up everywhere.

Only by allowing fully expressed jerkiness could I know that I harbored this jerkiness deep inside. Only by embodying being a jerk could I begin to consider accepting what I didn’t allow to be there. Only with acceptance could I turn my attention outward and realize the effect this had on others.

The word ‘jerk’ now began to seem too mild, almost flip. I don’t need to just modify a behavior here. This is deep and painful and resulted in hurt to others too.

I didn’t know how to approach the issue when I perceived that my colleague who left was accusing me of wrongdoing, and freezing me out. I was too distracted by my reactions to take the other person in.

There is a requirement for both the self-belief of good world citizenship (I am a good person, I am not racist, I honor everyone, I don’t keep anyone down) and the truth of my reactions (I am complicit, I am responsible, I harbor racist ideas and feelings, I treat people differently according to certain characteristics) in order for me to bring these inner machinations to outward expression.

I imagined the scene in the movie ‘Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope’ where the characters were trapped in a giant garbage compactor and the sides started moving in to crush them. At the last second, one of them pulled up a metal pipe that prevented the walls from closing in completely.
This is where I felt I was resting – I had a pipe preventing me from getting to the heart of this conflict either by disavowing it or getting discouraged. I wanted to give myself the time and space to explore the dimensions, texture and strength of that pipe that prevented me from being squashed between a too generous belief in my acceptance of everyone, and a defensive rejection to feedback I am receiving.

LEANING INTO MY EXPERIENCE OF MY RACISM

At a ‘Black Lives Matter’ event I attended, a woman yelled at the audience, saying “I’m tired! You allies need to not just sit here, you need to do something!” I wish I had heard her call-to-arms and felt determined and proud to be helpful. That was not my reaction.

My real reaction was: This approach does not galvanize me. I’m not going to do anything if I just get yelled at. I’m here because this means something to me and now you’re just treating me like some white church lady. You think because I’m white I’m not doing anything. You don’t know me and my heart. If I don’t matter to you then you don’t matter to me.

Second reaction: I want to find out how to be a part of a movement that is essential to our society’s survival. I want people to know I care about them and their integrity as fellow humans. I want to do whatever I can to help this and I have no idea how to do anything beyond attending this event. What am I supposed to do?

When these reactions remain just thoughts, they fly too fast to notice and know clearly. They bounce too quickly from one pole to the other, like a pinball, bouncing off of each other and other walls and barriers and then they lose all of their energy and go away. I can slow this down by writing the thoughts and even more by verbalizing them. I can preserve their energy in a useful way.

And then I returned to the ‘Star Wars’ scene and realized that perhaps me trying to keep something separated was not serving me. I needed to bring my compartmented selves into contact to move toward integration. The answer is not one thing or another. My full self will bring about a gestalt that I long for.

I began to wonder how to do this in real life. Do I need to say things out loud to someone else? Especially, do I need to say them to the person who elicited this process in me? That’s scary territory. I don't think I need to say potentially hurtful things to someone when I'm just trying to figure out how to get myself somewhere. These things I'm thinking to myself are raw and rude and obtuse, and all the things that the part of myself concerned with respecting others and nurturing them, as well as trying not to appear ignorant, tries to shut down.

I have found that sometimes I need to talk to the person who elicited this in me, but only when I have a clearer direction for my path. Most of the time, I need to get away from the person and think it through and hopefully they are still available when I'm ready to come back. I think if someone is telling me something that they think is extremely important, they might be willing to return to a dialogue.

I have realized that everyone else is not as fascinated in my process as I am, and also, I’m not inclined to fill them in on the part where I’m really a jerk, or I’m racist. I
often claim to not care what people think of me, but I do. I especially do not want to cause someone pain thoughtlessly or narcissistically. I believe in my goodness.

**A GOOD PERSON WHO HAS BEEN COMPLICIT**

As I continue forward through my life, thinking I have it pretty well figured out, every few years I tend to get smacked back down to some well-needed humility. As I have gently begun to pay attention to myself, as if I were my own well-loved child, I continued to notice how often I engage in racist and bigoted behavior. It was often and it was blatant.

I saw a documentary and made notes only when the men were speaking.

I read about a black woman admitted to an Ivy League school with a full scholarship and I attributed her admission to ‘equal opportunity’ only.

I negatively judged someone’s resume by their name.

When reading a book and a character’s race was unspecified, I assumed they were white and felt disappointed when I found out they were not.

I heard someone of color ask for compensation for work I was doing for free, and rolled my eyes.

I dismissed a woman who wanted to give me feedback by labeling them ‘difficult to get along with’.

It has become sharply figural for me to get better at dealing with my racism, the more my racism becomes figural. Instead of prematurely praising myself for this wonderful observation, I am determined to stay with my ever-present reactions for a good long exploration.

**PERHAPS OTHERS ARE JERKS TOO**

Maybe being a jerk is an opportunity for everyone. Maybe I can hold space for other people’s jerkiness. In sessions people are always saying “This is terrible, but..., this is bad, but..., don’t think I’m a jerk, but...”

What I tell them in a session is, “I don’t think you’re terrible”, or “It’s ok to say anything you want to say”. It really is, when there is a supportive place to let it out in the service of exploration and growth.

There are a lot of differences in messages about communicating that I have introjected. When I was younger, I was often told that I needed to be more tactful and careful when talking to people, that I’m too direct and people don’t like that. When I was older, I was often told that I am a very kind, caring and patient listener. Growing into adulthood with the internet introduced the main rule of etiquette: Don’t be a jerk.

Since it has been difficult for me to stay with and express a reaction that I judged as jerky, I found that these factors were helpful in letting loose:

- Somewhere away from my target
- Someone to talk to who knew me well
- Someone who was interested in my process
- Someone who didn’t have an investment in the outcome
- Someone who could elicit deeper expression
Plenty of time
The permission to say ‘bad things’ less self-consciously and more creatively
Knowing that the other person knows my reactions are not a reflection of my whole self
Holding the intention for more genuinely experienced acceptance of people

According to several anecdotal references I’ve heard from people or read somewhere, Fritz Perls was unabashedly unafraid if people thought he was a jerk. A lot of people saw the beginning of his jerk process, but the ending of that process didn’t generate as much buzz. For instance, there is a story where he went and laid down and actually slept during a session. Perhaps the ending of that process of his being a jerk was that the other person experienced the value and priority he gave to a person bringing their full self to him.

And now I see opportunities to be a jerk everywhere! Yes! I can walk away when I’m bored. I can ignore when my dog wants to go out. I can criticize people’s appearance. This must be important! And I remain unwilling to make that public (except for right now, gulp).

I saw a documentary about transgender intersectionality, and a quote resonated with me. I paraphrase: As long as I was standing there, afraid to move, I was in the way of someone else who needed that place (‘Gender Journeys: More Than a Pronoun’, directed by Tess Kunik, 2016).

I believe that my being able to lean into being a jerk is helping me break the paralysis of feeling that I am a good person while unconsciously perpetuating an oppressive system.

I am learning to ask how I may have used my power destructively. I know that I am not above some bad behavior when I feel down and out. I get defensive and resentful about my experience of being ignored during hardships I have suffered, when I am asked to attend to the hardships of others. If I am having a bad time, I forget that I am not the center of the universe.

My experiences with my own behavior continued to multiply as I was writing this article. And then, like magic, an opportunity arose for me to be a part of someone else’s being a jerk.

I STEP ASIDE

I belong to a social club, and overheard some sexist and transphobic joking going on during a get-together. I attempted to de-escalate...
the joking but I wasn’t heard so I yelled something like this, “If you need to talk like that DO IT SOMEWHERE ELSE!”

The aftermath of my outburst was that I approached the leadership of this group and requested a dialogue about our inclusive language, and I was denied that opportunity. The leaders of the group did not see a problem. They thought it was harmless joking and that I am unreasonable in expecting them to police everyone’s speech. They were unwilling to hear how I felt or what life was like for me. They were quite angry that I would accuse them of sexism and transphobia.

I realized how often I have been on that side of this kind of situation. How angry I was when someone pointed out that I was racist. How many times I have felt people were asking too much or getting offended about something I perceived as being of little importance.

And then I turned back to myself because I recognized my IMAX-sized projection. I said to myself, “Just remember this when you next find yourself involved in a situation you don’t feel good about but were not ready to take responsibility for willingly entering.”

I realized that there isn’t a good way to point out that someone else really could feel better if they explored their jerkiness. That they could change for the better (and do things my way). I was not the right person for them to learn from at that time.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I appreciate the opportunity to communicate my initial and primitive attempts to explore something that I have kept subconscious and that is now growing in clarity. I have a lot of work ahead of me - not just in freeing my inner jerk, but being a committed and thoughtful and supported jerk.

I have battled with myself about going through with this article because I have felt like yet another white person talking about their process. When I stop pretending I’m not a jerk – when I accept my prejudice and my racism as inescapable facets of living as a white person in a mixed society – I can then more easily relinquish my platform. Being able to allow another’s experience, without negating my own experiences of hardship, has been essential for me being able to step aside.

I am learning to share my platform with others, and the dialogue is getting more lively and spontaneous and fulfilling. I see and hear the others now. I step aside.
Karla Morse is a licensed professional counsellor in New Jersey, USA. She has worked with gender-variant people since the mid-2000s and began working in private practice in 2011, specialising in treating gender dysphoria. She completed her formal training in gestalt therapy at The Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia in May 2017.

kleinbrookcounselingservices@gmail.com
STAYING WITH UBIQUITOUS SHAME:
REFLECTIONS ON INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION FROM A GESTALT PERSPECTIVE
by Bernadette O’Koon, Gillian LaRue, Janelle Dixon & Paige Ziegler

You’re going to think I’m crazy”, he says, his dark brown eyes darting up and meeting my dark blue ones. “Maybe, but I kind of doubt it”, I respond, hoping to soothe him with my voice. “From what I’ve learned of you, Duncan1, you’re resourceful and you’re smart. I’m wondering how whatever you’re going to tell me helps you to survive”.

Duncan’s head is now down, he is looking at the table between us. I sense anxiety, noticing that I no longer feel my ass in the chair. I wonder what is swirling around in that 22-year-old brain of his and realize that I’m spending way too much time in this 38-year-old brain of mine. “I notice that I’m not really breathing. Are you?” He looks at me like I’m a little nuts (which is perhaps pretty close to a truth) and says, “No, not really.” “Let’s take a breath.” And we do. He glances at me again. Briefly, but for just long enough; we are in contact. I can feel my feet, a little sweaty, in my sandals. I notice my ass, clenched a little less tightly, in the hard metal chair.

Slowing down, I take him in, brown and lanky, slumped in the chair across from me. I notice his breath is shallow in his chest. His hands fidget with one another. I try to imagine him listening to Vivaldi - an unlikely pastime he disclosed in our first meeting a week ago. I see myself, circa 1994, in small-town Kentuckiana, reading Dante’s Inferno at the local Dairy Queen. “Misfits (and mis-fits), the both of us” I think, smiling to myself. My chest feels full and warm. Gratitude and awe wash over me as I regard him - no, me... no, us - in that ‘unconditionally positive’ kind of way.

Then, withdrawing from my fantasy of confluence and returning to the larger field I share with Duncan, I sense shame. I feel myself shrinking in my chair, my body instinctively mirroring his. The room is hot and the air is thick. Breathing it in does not refresh; it stifles, sticking to the sides of my lungs. I feel my throat tighten, my temples throb. Bravely, he looks

1 Names and other identifying information have been changed to protect the privacy of the client.
up again, perhaps checking to see if I am still with him, if he can trust me. Perhaps I do the same. My body relaxes and opens back up, into gratitude, into stillness, as I meet his eyes. Centered and quiet, I wait, I notice. Then with a nervous sound that isn’t quite a laugh, he states his truth.

“I hate Black people.”

“Houston, we have a problem” I think to myself, “this kid is Black and there ain’t no gettin’ ‘round it”. My heart beats faster as my shame and panic threaten to overtake me. For a split second, I am reminded of my own internalized hatred, of what it means to be both ‘poor White trash’ and ‘uppity liberal elite’ while simultaneously being neither of those things. Recognizing I can (and do) pass in both worlds, I am acutely aware that Duncan’s experience is not my own. He literally cannot escape his own skin. I notice I am no longer in my body. I come back to center, to my breath, to my very white ass in the very hard chair. “Hmmm…” I say aloud, stalling, hoping he will elaborate without my awkward prompting.

The air is thicker still, but I breathe it in, determined to stay present, to stay slow. I look at Duncan, acknowledging, at least to myself, that his truth is not a new disclosure. He says it with his body, with his voice, with his choices. “I hate Black people”. It is part of him. It is also part of me, though I try not to see it. I say it with my body, with my voice, with my choices. Silently, I try on his phrase, “I hate Black people…”. He places his hands on the table, uncertain, reaching. I lift my hands from my lap and do the same. We touch each other through the table, touching ‘Black and White’, touching ‘hatred and compassion’, touching ‘I and Thou’. Our eyes meet, ever so hesitantly, ever so briefly. Courageously, we sit in the shared ground of unquestioned hatred. Waiting, staying...

BERNADETTE:

From this moment in session, probably less than 30 seconds, an experiment emerged. Four doctoral students of diverse (and also similar) backgrounds came together to discuss internalized oppression. I shared my experience sitting with Duncan, reading the above passage aloud to the group. Gillian, Janelle, and Paige shared their experiences and together we expanded upon my dialogue with Duncan - including not only new voices, but also a new level of system, i.e. education and training of clinical psychologists at Wright State University School of Professional Psychology. In order to better see ourselves and each other, this conversation was video-recorded. Each of us reviewed the video independently, reflecting further on our experiences.

Printed below are the reflections of my classmates upon the experience, along with my own reflections on internalized oppression from a relational, gestalt perspective. Based upon my education at Wright State University School of Professional Psychology, life changing experiences at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, and fortuitous interactions with clients like Duncan, I believe that a relational approach is key to healing internalized oppression (and privilege) and dismantling the institutions that support it.

PAIGE:

I am not sure what I was expecting when I sat down to hear Bernie’s case presentation. Unfortunately, I was acutely aware of the camera watching our reactions. I was struck first by the seriousness in Bernie’s tone and
demeanor when she began to read. It put me a bit on edge for what was to come. It was as if I were watching and listening to something that I should not have been allowed to see or hear - like peeking through a crack in the door. It felt too personal on multiple levels. It felt invasive to be hearing Bernie’s thoughts, to feel her insecurities rise up, to know her scars. It felt personal to hear Duncan’s side of things too. I could feel his shame, his pain, and what I took to be an underlying sense of anger. I found myself settling in to Bernie’s perspective as I imagined the situation. I saw through her eyes. When she breathed, I breathed. When her emotion caught in her throat, mine did too. The only time my alignment with her broke was when she took moments to check in with herself. At these times, I remained frozen within the story, waiting for it to resume. I felt as though Duncan’s statement, “I hate Black people”, rippled through the air. I felt my own visceral reaction of shock, and then of sadness. In the next ripple I felt Bernie’s reaction, and then Janelle’s, and then Gillian’s. Although I could not quite decipher their reactions, I could feel their reactions almost as clearly as my own. I found it difficult to look at Janelle and Gillian (who are Black) in that moment. I wanted to look at Janelle and Gillian - looking directly into the eclipse as I sat simply watching its shadow cross the back of a cereal box. Discussing the story was perhaps even harder to do than listening to it. I sat vibrating in my seat like a ball of energy, afraid to begin rolling in any particular direction. I feel inadequate even having a seat at such conversations because I firmly feel that I do not even know what I do not know. As such, I took a backseat role in the conversation and tried my best to learn from afar. At the very end, I was left with quite a few questions. I considered what Duncan’s statement meant to him. In what ways did he mean it? In what ways did he not? How did it feel to say it to a White woman? Would he have said it if she were Black? When exactly did he realize this about himself and how did that realization affect him? How does he feel now? I considered my own practice as a growing clinician. What might my reaction have been? Am I ever as present in my sessions as Bernie appeared to be in her session? What impact might it make if I were to allow myself to feel that deeply and authentically in session?

JANELLE:

I sat next to Bernadette during our dialogue session. As she prepared to share her therapy session with us I could immediately sense that she was anxious. I observed her attempting to relax her body and taking in deep breaths. As I observed her attempting to relax herself I realized that my breath was shallow, and began to engage in deep breathing as well. The room fell silent and all of our colleagues patiently watched her; eager to discover what she was going to share. As she began to share her therapy experience I envisioned myself in the room observing the session from an aerial view. I could see the client slumped over in the chair, contemplating what he should reveal to his therapist. I noticed Bernadette viewing her client with a sense of concern and wonder. As Bernadette continued to share the session with us I quickly discovered why she was nervous to disclose the session with us. “I hate Black people”. As soon as the words were released from Bernadette’s
mouth I immediately wondered what I would do if I was in her position. “I hate Black people”. I am a Black cisgender heterosexual woman. My most salient identity variable is my Blackness. Therefore, if this client hates Black people does he also hate me? In that moment I felt an overwhelming sense of sadness. What has the client’s journey been to make him hate an entire race of people who look just like him? The internalized oppression that the client experiences is the direct result of the messages that he has received from the system he lives in, the country he lives in.

After Bernadette shared the remainder of the therapeutic moment with us, we sat in silence - processing. We began to share our feedback regarding Bernadette’s experience and unsurprisingly had very different experiences. Although we are all clinical psychology doctoral students and women, we identify with different races and backgrounds. Some of us resonated with Bernadette, others were angered by the society that the client lives in, while I felt sadness. Despite our differences we all were open and received our experiences with warmth and compassion.

GILLIAN:

I noticed several reactions I was having while listening to Bernie’s account of her therapy session. I felt a sense of comfort and security in hearing her describe her client. Her recognition of the differences in diversity variables between her and her client promoted a sense of safety and comfort for me. As I listened to her describe those differences, I could sense the nervousness she may have felt in the moment with her client, based on her description of the initial part of the session. That nervousness transferred to me. I could feel my hand shaking and my legs become restless.

As an African-American female, I would say that my most salient diversity variable is my race. Hearing Bernie describe her client as an African-American male, I quickly began to envision myself as her client during the description of the encounter. My strongest reaction came once Bernie relayed her client’s statement, “I hate Black people”. I felt a mix of emotions. I felt the anger that I hope one day this client will experience from having this self-hatred. This anger comes from knowing all of the prejudice and stereotypes that are often communicated about us (African-Americans) in society. My anger also came from the fact that her client has hate for a group of people that all share my most salient diversity variable. I also felt like I was experiencing the sadness deep down he has about hating who he is because of the messages he has received from others. The anger and sadness led to me feeling a sense of numbness throughout my body. At that point, I no longer felt like I was the client but felt like I was an onlooker of the session. His hatred for my most salient identity took away my ability to relate with Bernie's client like I had done so quickly before.

Hearing Bernie’s description of mirroring her client’s actions during the course of his revelation that he hates Black people decreased some of my experiences of anger. Her mirroring his confession gave me a sense of relief that she was allowing her client to sit with and reflect on what he had revealed. This relief came with the sense that maybe this could be an opportunity for Bernie’s client to be able to gain compassion and love for who he is rather than hatred.
I have not had much exposure with gestalt therapy. I am familiar with the empty chair technique, which I often employ during session. I can see the value in placing awareness to what one is experiencing. Hearing Bernie’s experience with her client through a gestalt lens helped me take a closer look at reactions I was having that I would not have otherwise noticed or understood.

BERNADETTE:

One of the most interesting things to come out of our discussion was the thought that perhaps my client, a person of color, was able to express this internalized oppression to me because of our differences and because of the way we were able to improvise together in session. Even though I was ostensibly in a ‘power-up’ position because of my age, my status as trainee (and his as client), my (current) socioeconomic status, and my race, by allowing myself to be present and vulnerable with my client (to varying degrees throughout the session), we were able to relate to one another in a human, ‘I-Thou’, way. In this moment, we were able to linger in the ‘in between’, to surrender to that which was emerging - individually and intersubjectively, which I believe allowed my client to give voice to his shame (while I contacted both his shame and my own) in a way that I believe was affirming and healing for both of us.2

2. Silence breeds shame. As Kniffley (2014) notes: In an effort to protect their caregivers in the previous generation, many [Black] children will assume a posture of silence when indirectly exposed to the trauma experiences of prior generations… However, this silence may be the primary vehicle through which the transmission of trauma-related behaviors and ways of thinking occurs across generations. The avoidance of dealing with the grief, shame, and guilt related to cultural trauma contributes to family dysfunction via the passing down of unspoken rules. These unspoken rules are related to the transmission of unclear messages including the institution of slavery, subsequent culturally traumatic experiences, their influence on the experience of racial and ethnic identity development, and trauma related symptoms such as emotional numbness (alexithymia) and hypervigilance (anger and aggression)....

Thus, arguably, because I am not Black, Duncan did not sense a need to protect me from his shame and self-hatred.

In reflecting on the contact between Duncan and myself, I was reminded of the dance of merging and separating, breathing in and breathing out, and of how this dance begins in the womb and continues throughout our lives in different ways and in different relationships. As Laura Perls (1992) stated, “[c]ontact is possible only to the extent that support for it is available”. As a psychology trainee, I often make the assumption that my client will find support in recognizing our similarities. As a result, I often try to minimize differences in session. However, with Duncan, it was arguably difference, not similarity, that supported his disclosure of shame and self-hatred. Gillian, a woman of color, stated that she could feel herself becoming angry when she imagined Duncan stating “I hate Black people”. We talked about how the work might have been different if she had been my client’s therapist and about how he may not have shared the same feelings of shame with her because of their similarities. In effect, for the client to state to her “I hate Black people” would have been equivalent to stating “I hate you”. My colleague is no less sensitive or skilled a therapist. However, perhaps it was my difference (in this case in race) that created space for Duncan to state the unthinkable. Ironically, if I had been more similar to the client, we may have felt more bound to a script of how Black people are supposed to talk about their Blackness - thus perhaps robbing us of the ability to
play, improvise, and meet at the contact boundary.³

Yet, difference may also be dangerous. My argument that difference allowed for greater contact between myself and Duncan is not meant in any way to minimize the harm that the White culture (with which I admittedly identify) has imposed upon people of color. And certainly, well-meaning White persons like myself have unwittingly contributed to the oppression of people of color by mistaking indoctrination for liberation. As Woodson (1933) eloquently noted: “The education of the Negroes, then, the most important thing in the uplift of the Negroes, is almost entirely in the hands of those who have enslaved them and now segregate them.” Liberation comes from within, it is not something that we can bestow upon one another. As I write this I am aware of my own vanity, of my vulnerability to the White savior complex. And I am also aware of the undeniable power (and humility) born of the shared moment between Duncan and myself. Perhaps we need one another to become more ourselves. Paradox, tension, inconsistency remain afoot…

As I re-read what I wrote and as I reflect on the therapeutic encounter with Duncan, I am struck by the power of non-verbal communication - that dialogue happens not just through words, but through movement, pacing, tone, eye contact and posture (see e.g. Frank and La Barre, 2011). I did not have the words to capture the complexity of my reaction to the client’s disclosure in that moment. Everything I could think of then (and now) seems trite or condescending. I could have asked what he hates about Black people, I could have tried to convince him that not all Black people are deserving of his hate, I could have talked about my own internalized oppression, I could have voiced my discomfort - but these responses seemed disingenuous and/or more geared toward easing my discomfort than toward maintaining therapeutic contact with and attunement to the client. By being quiet and unhurried, I allowed the client (and myself) to sit with the shame of internalized oppression just a little longer, to see (and allow to be seen) these ‘ugly’ truths that exist inside (and outside) both of us. And I believe that both of us walked away from that session with a little more self-compassion and a little less shame.

Difference alone was not sufficient to establish contact between Duncan and myself. Rather, a commitment to staying in the here and now, genuine curiosity and care for Duncan, and a focus on increasing awareness rather than pushing a therapeutic agenda, allowed me to really attune to my client. Thus, this client, who so seldom ‘reaches’ for anything in his life (perhaps because my White culture has taught him that he does not deserve it, that his request will not be seen or met), placed his hands on the table, silently communicating (I believe) that he wanted to be met, to make contact, to experience a moment of togetherness and shared understanding. As someone who has been told she has a tendency to ‘overreach’, my presence and patience allowed me to wait for the client to come to me (rather than overpowering him with my concern and sympathy, which I was certainly feeling the urge to do). I was able to tolerate not only his experience, but also my own internal experience of both internalized oppression and shame of my White privilege, in a way that felt safe - a way that contained our shame and allowed me to hold (and in some ways be held by) the client. All of this was too subtle to have put into words in the moment - but I communicated it through my eye contact and by placing my hands on the table between us.⁴

⁴ How do these minutiae reflect what might be needed to heal internalized oppression in the larger field and at higher levels of system? How do we thwart the reach of one another? When can we promote contact and equality by yielding, by holding back? How do we provide support by making space for the other to reach out?
As a student of gestalt psychotherapy and psychology, I am continually struck by the power of presence and dialogue to open us to experimenting and new experiencing. I am grateful for the opportunity to dialogue with Duncan, to continue the dialogue with my colleagues, and now to open the dialogue to a wider audience. How do we as psychologists, students, and humans utilize our differences in ways that liberate rather than enslave? How do we cultivate courage in ourselves to give voice to our shame and create safety for others as they confront their own? How can we co-create a gestalt model of internalized oppression that is respectful of the experiences of everyone in the field, that incorporates a developmental framework, that recognizes how internalized oppression affects not only our thoughts and beliefs but also our movements, bodily experience of the world and of one another? How might such a model help inform our treatment of internalized oppression on an individual level, but more importantly, how could it help us to dismantle the larger systems that support oppression?

REFERENCES


Bernadette D. O’Koon, Gillian LaRue, Janelle Dixon and Paige Ziegler are doctoral students at Wright State University School of Professional Psychology in Dayton, Ohio, USA. They are passionate about the intersection of psychology and social justice, particularly for people of color, individuals of low socioeconomic status, and women. bernadetteokoon@gmail.com
One day in a pub in central London, a person was speaking passionately about the lack of accessibility in gestalt psychotherapy. Another person at the table disagreed, and a dialogue was born.

**AN EXPLORATION**

**Ayhan Alman de la Osa**

As a gestalt psychotherapy trainee with a diverse background whose first language is German, I was recently startled by a simple question: “What does gestalt mean?” As an overbearing ambassador for German-ness (my family is Turkish, but let’s park that for now) I quickly came to offer answers for important questions. So here I am – trainee therapist – writing about gestalt and its meaning.

The harsh reality, there is very little poetics about the word gestalt. The most poetic it can get is if I used the word ‘Gestaltung’ which refers to the process of creation or design. In German, the word ‘gestalt’ is often associated with ‘form’ or ‘shape’, which makes sense in relation to creation and design. The term ‘gestalt therapy’, even in ‘Deutsch’ is confusing and didn’t make any sense to me prior to my training. When I was collating my ideas for this article I imagined what it was like when Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (PHG) thought about how to name their ideas:

Ralph: Why don’t we call it hot seat therapy?

Paul: I like it… [chuckles seductively]

Fritz: [Rolls eyes] Hot seat therapy? Seriously! There is much more than that!

Ralph: What more? Isn’t that the main thing you do?

Fritz: Ralph, we wrote a whole book about it! What about contact, interruptions, and figure formation?
Paul: Here we go again! We need to make a decision. Let’s get on with it you both!

Ralph: What does Laura think? She wrote most of your part, Fritz!

Paul: She suggested calling it existential therapy [rolls eyes]!

Fritz: We need something a bit more exotic, something that sticks, something you get curious about and wonder what it is... mysterious, so people have lots of projections and assumptions.

Paul: What about form therapy?

Fritz: I got it: gestalt therapy.

Paul: I hate it!

Ralph: I hate it too!

Fritz: Wonderful!

Sadly, Fritz didn’t know back then how ‘accessibility’ would become a thing of the future. The Oxford Dictionary (2010) defines the term ‘accessibility’, as I use it here, with the following qualities:

- Easy to be reached or entered
- Easy to obtain or use
- Easy to be understood or appreciated

In short, gestalt is neither easy to be reached, entered, obtained or used. Some concepts, however, are easy to be understood or appreciated, thanks to gestalt theorists who changed gestalt language to improve accessibility.

IS GESTALT EASY TO BE REACHED OR ENTERED?

Neither in the UK nor in Germany can clients consciously choose to get free gestalt therapy through the National Health Service (NHS) or the German public health system. Even though in the UK clients can ask for a gestalt therapist when they are assessed, it is very likely such a request would delay their access to treatment, because a suitable and available therapist needs to be found and paired with the client. In Germany, public health care covers primarily cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychoanalytic options. Sometimes, private insurances pay for alternative treatments, but access to such insurers depends on an income threshold and therefore excludes many people on lower incomes. From my experience of volunteering as a therapist in the UK, sometimes clients’ experience of CBT doesn’t give them what they hoped for and they ask for something else. Their approach was “not CBT” rather than “gestalt, please”. Neither in Germany nor the UK is gestalt easy to be reached or entered without paying for it.

Also, training in gestalt therapy is an expensive endeavour. In addition to regular increases in training fees, students have to pay for supervision and personal therapy. Even though continuous professional development (CPD) workshops or gestalt conferences are voluntary, it is valuable to widen one’s horizons and connect with the gestalt community. If English isn’t your first language, or if you are in general a bit anxious about your writing, you might also want academic support to get through your course. All these services are often discounted, but still cost money, which in return increases your need for paid work.
so you can fund your training. If you want to do your mental health familiarisation placement (MHFP) – a requirement to register with the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) – chances are, you will struggle to find a place and will be asked to pay a fee for your placement because you are burdening hospital staff. While you work more to fund your training you also need to make time for clinical placements where you see your weekly clients. Often there is additional placement supervision on top of your regular gestalt supervision. Because many placements are with charities, sometimes they can be short on funding and ask volunteers to chip in to pay for supervision and placement specific training. Even when you have completed your training, the prospects of making a living from therapeutic work are low when you start out. You will suffer balancing paid work with obtaining a gestalt qualification throughout training and possibly after. Therefore, gestalt is not easy to be reached or entered by clients and therapists.

So how come clients and therapists still choose gestalt when it's so difficult to be reached or entered? Despite all difficulties to access gestalt there is something very unique about it, which varies for every individual. For me personally, it is the creative nature of gestalt that attracted me in the first place. My training and ongoing therapy impacted on my capacity to balance work, training and personal life creatively. I am aware that I am privileged in a sense that I have found a way to support myself financially and emotionally through training, and that this is not the case for many others. Training organisations and the gestalt community seem aware of increased financial demands, and offer bursaries and payment options to ease the funding pain. Even though I appreciate such initiatives, I still think we are excluding many who are unable to fund their training or therapy.

**IS GESTALT EASY TO OBTAIN OR USE?**

There are theoretical ideas of gestalt and there is gestalt as an experience. It is impossible to sit at home, read a book and understand what gestalt is about without experiencing contact (PHG, 1951), dialogue (Buber, 1965), the paradoxical theory of change (Beisser, 1970), field theory (Parlett, 1991), body process (Kepner, 1999), the phenomenological method (Spinelli, 2005), and many more concepts that are integral part of gestalt therapy. Gestalt needs human to human contact to make sense and therefore you need to be in therapy or in training to understand the concepts. As a result, it is also more difficult to collate quantitative evidence of gestalt's effectiveness - for example, how do you measure presence and its effect on clients, break it down into a metric and give it a value? This is what organisations like the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) need in order to recommend certain treatment types. They need extensive evidence of how different types of therapy and interventions improve mental health.

NICE currently recommends only CBT for the treatment of severe depression (Saxon et al, 2017). Professor Gillian Hardy presented a quantitative study at the UKCP research conference in September 2017, aiming to investigate the effect of Counselling for Depression (CfD) for severe depression with person-centred experiential therapy. The results were compelling and we, as gestaltists, will very likely profit from such
investigations.

Gestalt terminology is also misleading. The word ‘gestalt’ itself makes no sense in German or in English to describe what happens therapeutically. It was invented at a time when social, political and economic needs were different. Five different therapists will give five different answers to what gestalt means. It is this ambiguity that makes gestalt exciting, creative, adaptive and flexible, but also makes it more difficult to transmit gestalt’s essence and meaning to a wider audience with clarity and precision. We live today in a political field of austerity, where return on investment and evidence based models are preferred. With all the social, political and economic uncertainties, I want to be able to communicate my work as a gestalt practitioner with precision and clarity to my clients. But this is nearly impossible. We speak one language in our community and then translate everything into human language for our clients. How come we have created such a two-tier model, instead of using simple and easy to understand language? Gestalt’s very nature – the way we describe gestalt – is difficult to be obtained or used.

**IS GESTALT EASY TO BE UNDERSTOOD OR APPRECIATED?**

When it comes to understanding and appreciating gestalt, I feel biased due to my training. Gestaltists have been innovating over the years and have adjusted concepts to a more contemporary understanding. For example, Phil Joyce and Charlotte Sills changed the word egotism. They write:

“...we have removed the term ‘egotism’ as we believe it is misleading, and replaced it with ‘self-monitoring’. We have also endeavoured to use words (verbs, where possible) that reflect the modifications/interruptions (we use the words interchangeably depending on context) as active processes for regulating contact, not static positions.” (2014:106)

This may seem a small change, but inevitably makes one concept easier to be understood and appreciated. I don’t need to reinvent a word for my client when I describe this moderation to contact, because the word itself is explanation enough.

Elinor Greenberg is another innovator who has been expanding accessibility for gestaltists. She transformed the term ‘personality disorders’ – a term often provoking unease for gestalt practitioners who prefer to refrain from pathologising – to ‘personality adaptations’. She has been engaging with the general public through social media, blogs and podcasts, offering easy to understand language for sometimes complex concepts of the self. Historically, psychopathology has been perceived as reductionist and dehumanising within the gestalt community (Clarkson, 1989:27). Greenberg uses a language that respects human experience:

“When we diagnose, we are describing a pattern, a particular Gestalt, never a person. All people are unique. Labels, however well intended, cannot do justice to human complexity. The patterns that I describe [...] are analogous to melodies played on an instrument.” (2016:3)

It is this shift of perspective in gestalt that made complex theory more accessible, and therefore easier to be understood and appreciated.
And finally, I would like to highlight the work of Lynne Jacobs who recently set out an aspiration that we in gestalt “move beyond transference” and proposed instead the idea of “Enduring Relational Themes (ERTs)”, which she defines as “repetitive modes of engagement” (2017:9). The word ‘transference’ originates from Freud and the original word in German is ‘Übertragung’. The translation into English doesn't do justice to the actual meaning of the word. The first part, Über, translates as ‘over’ or ‘across’. The second part, tragung, originates from ‘tragen’ which translates as ‘to carry’. So what the term ‘Übertragung’ describes in German is literally carrying something over onto another person. The phonetic of the word ‘Übertragung’ in German sounds harsh, while in contrast the word ‘transference’ in English sounds to me neat and friendly. Jacobs’ approach to redefining transference into a more contemporary – and from my point of view more accurate description – has enabled me to better understand and appreciate the concept of transference.

**CONCLUSION**

By writing this article I came to appreciate a change in my thinking and widening of my perspective. Yes, gestalt is less accessible for many and so are other therapy forms. I learned about initiatives of non-gestaltists who are aiming to improve accessibility of counselling (and inevitably of gestalt) through collating much needed evidence. Gestalt theorists are finding creative ways of explaining complex processes without watering down the meaning of such concepts. While it might not be easy to reach, enter, obtain or use gestalt, I feel appreciative about the shifts that have taken place to better understand and appreciate gestalt theory. The economic, political and scientific challenges we face as gestalt practitioners in a time of austerity can be heartbreaking. As a rebellious ‘fringe’ therapist, I am hoping that our creative community will transform gestalt and enable more clients to access gestalt therapy as an alternative and valid choice to our cousins, CBT and psychodynamics.

**A RESPONSE**

**Nick Adlington**

I appreciate your article, Ayhan; I appreciate its thoroughness, its grounding, your insights, and what I find to be your integrity in the tone of your argument. I also respect and value the efforts you have made to articulate your perspectives on gestalt psychotherapy. You have brought energy to the subject, and to my mind been brave in articulating that. In this exchange, I consider myself to have the much easier job of following your lead. In my response I use terminology and frameworks that would perhaps not usually be associated with gestalt psychotherapy, and a profession that focuses on social and psychological impact. I intend no disrespect to gestalt psychotherapy in doing so, but instead offer a different perspective in order that we may consider our gestalt world in alternative ways.

I found myself agreeing with much of what you wrote. As a trainee gestalt psychotherapist, I also very much sit with the costs involved, and the potential market rate once qualified. I sympathise with the translation of terms from gestalt into a wider environment, for example, when discussing gestalt with friends, I often find myself translating ‘field’, into something like ‘context’. I find myself in lengthy descriptions including
the use of phrases such as ‘increased awareness’, ‘shining a light on wholeness’, ‘being in relationship’, ‘creativity’. I enjoy and feel relief when you highlight those writers who have adapted the theory and language into perhaps a more contemporary vogue, one that makes the theory and profession less separate and elite.

Yet, as I write this response I also find myself somewhat confused and enveloped in a type of mental torpor, stagnation. I am interested in this experience as a response to what you’ve written. Let me try to explore these thoughts and sensations further.

In this moment I hold the dichotomy that every industry must sit with, that of what develops from within and makes it unique, and what develops in relation to the external world, and the indivisible nature of the two. Perhaps this explains my confusion. As advocates for gestalt psychotherapy, we hold these two factors in hand. Gestalt psychotherapy is a technique, set of skills, a profession with its own theoretical underpinnings. The value of its theory, demonstrated through for example the language used, I would argue, is fundamental to its identity. Identity is key in that the skill, theory, profession, call it what you will, is the nucleus around which people gather, from which debate can be developed, and community evolved. From identity evolves the contemporary and crucial concept of brand and marketing. There is a rich density to gestalt theory and practice, fostered by components such as language. These components identify gestalt for what it is, and enable its exponents to celebrate, promote, and market the gestalt psychotherapy brand to others. For gestalt to be accessible, I would argue we inside the industry need to develop a vision of how it can fit in modern politics, business, and civil society. Contact and the nature of relationship is at the core of human existence in such spheres as global security, economics, and social development. That the thinking, theory, and practice of gestalt psychotherapy has something unique and of profound value to add to these spheres seems to me without doubt.

So, as I have earlier welcomed your reflections on the development of language into something that may be more accessible, I also wish to protect the integrity of the theory and am drawn to giving more emphasis to the potential of us gestaltists applying this theory to a world ‘out there’, to the other. As I say this I think of the language of web development and IT, a language which frankly, for the most part, is utterly unfathomable to me. Yet, this seems to have provided no barrier to the application of IT in day-to-day life.

What I have been articulating is the potential of gestalt psychotherapy to be more coherent around how, where, and with whom it wishes to promote itself; that it may then grow and thrive, and percolate into structures and systems of national and international governance. I am thankful for the focus on research that certain professionals bring to gestalt psychotherapy. At the joint AAGT/EAGT conference in Taormina, Leslie Greenberg gave an inspiring lecture emphasising the importance and value of research. In addition, I believe gestalt organisations such as UKAGP, EAGT, AAGT should be supported, so that gestalt has a collective and coherent voice. I heard some dissention at Taormina about the size of the conference. I do not sit here and criticise people’s experience, and I respect
that different contexts will fit with different individual styles and personality types. However, in that the Brexit vote could be seen as a cutting off from the other, I would challenge any fear of gestalt psychotherapy becoming too big, or of growing beyond what can be controlled. In considering gestalt therapy as you have done, this is the greatest challenge. How far are we inside the machine willing to loosen the reins and let the horse run?

I propose that the potential for a more accessible gestalt product lies in how we frame it in relation to the outside world; how we adapt its theories and concepts to this frame; and how we then promote or market its worth in these spheres. My challenge to your article is to create a vision for gestalt psychotherapy that stretches beyond it being a purely treatment based methodology. I will add some practical examples of how gestalt psychotherapy can do this.

Gestalt has the tools and theories to be promoting and advocating for process groups in schools, where children and young people can explore their experience in relation to meeting others, and develop skills to foster interpersonal dialogue. This type of accessibility does not have to be confined to schools. I would advocate meeting-points in public spaces whereby people can again explore and further their relational skills, supported by the wonderful theory and skills of people within the industry. I recognise that gestalt is currently applied by professionals working in organisational development, work-based training, and many other areas beyond treatment. Highlighting its application in these areas, and building further coherence around its value beyond treatment, will help to make it more accessible to a wider population.

I note your discussion about the ambiguity of the term ‘gestalt psychotherapy’, and your assertion that this ambiguity makes it more difficult to translate. I can only agree with you. What this perhaps raises is a further extension of the coherence point above; that extension being, how and in what way gestalt wishes to be perceived in 2018? What are gestalt's strengths? How and where is it relevant to the world’s current challenges? These seem to me questions of direction and focus that, if developed, can enable gestalt thinking to contact and positively influence societal and cultural conditions.

In summary, Erving and Miriam Polster said “Therapy is too good to be limited to the sick” (1974:23). Combine this with the contemporary developments in gestalt relational theory, and the field context of a world where being in relationship is continually challenging, and the opportunity, relevance, and accessibility seems obvious. My argument is that the challenge at our door is to look outwards and communicate gestalt's relevance. Gestalt holds the tools with which to do this. As you highlight, its creativity, its focus on experimentation, its focus on the present, these are all key concepts in gestalt that make it an accessible practice that is applicable through individual and community activity. I propose that this requires a shift in focus, and an application of more varied practice beyond clinical treatment.

I notice the stagnation I felt at the start of the article has shifted, and I feel lighter, more hopeful. I reflect on the support I find in creating and articulating visions. Sometimes the sobriety of the present weighs heavily,
but the promise of a wider, brighter future lifts me above my torpor. I wish to again repeat my appreciation of your articulation of an issue. Your article has allowed me to anchor my thinking and grow a response. For me, the deepest connection between human beings happens when we hear, recognise, and accept our differences.

A DISCOURSE

**Ayhan:** Thank you for your response to my article, Nick. I found myself moved by your thoughts and welcomed the dialogue we engaged within our articles and in person. I felt tempted to go back to my writing and edit aspects of it, but resisted. A bit like ‘Maybe I should have said more on xyz, or shouldn’t be so hard on Fritz’. How are you right now?

**Nick:** Yes, a feeling of anticipation, entering this dialogue, furthering on from your initial article and my response. I respect you greatly for articulating the issue of accessibility. I watched a short film clip last night where Erving Polster is asked what his hope was for the future of gestalt. His response was “I hope it would move into working with people beyond therapy so that they exercise the principles of gestalt therapy for people at large” (2014). This is where I go to when I think of accessibility, that it establishes a wider platform and application in civil society. I see the challenge as one of marketing, as well as the exercise of the skills themselves. I think we may meet on this point, but at a different part of the ‘gestalt tree’. I understand you as wishing gestalt to have a higher profile within the world of counselling and psychotherapeutic treatment; am I right on this? I also understand you as relating accessibility to a wider choice for the client.

By the way, I welcome elaboration and adjustments in your thinking on your initial article. I paraphrase Adrienne Rich (1995) when I say we are constantly refining the truths we tell each other, and by implication of this I would say ourselves too (many thanks to Jackie, by the way, for that reference). And I imagine Fritz would bear your hardness on him... I am obviously open to our differences.

**Ayhan:** Haha, Fritz would probably be able to take my hardness. I felt tempted to take out the bit where Ralph claims Laura wrote Fritz’s parts. I thought that was a bit below the belt, but then I also wondered how much credit has she been given for her contributions? For our differences, I don’t think we are too far away from each other. I feel like we are looking at the same problem from different angles. Your Meeting Points are a wonderful example for offering gestalt accessibility to people from all walks of life. How did you come up with that idea and what motivated you?

**Nick:** My inspiration for Meeting Point was a love of experiment, spontaneity, contact and growth. I am endlessly fascinated by the not known, of what is to happen; my energy rises and I feel excitement. What meaning does gestalt being accessible have for you right now, after our respective articles and the discussion so far?
Ayhan: You know, what I think of accessibility has changed since I wrote the article. When I joined the AAGT a few weeks ago, I noticed there were so many initiatives already going on to advance gestalt therapy. Some of these initiatives are trying to link gestalt theory with the DSM or undo the CBT myth. One study is exploring how to objectively identify gestalt therapy based on the therapists' interventions, to measure, so to speak, the level of gestalt. This sounds odd, but I can see how that might become important for effectiveness studies. While my inner nerd has been indulging in all these threads I came to appreciate through our dialogue that you don't need any effectiveness studies to offer accessibility to gestalt. You modelled with your Meeting Points how the unknown, the uncertain, the here and now, the phenomenon of existence, contact and excitement can be available for everyone. To answer your question, the word ‘polarities’ comes to my mind on an accessibility spectrum of science and creativity. What are your thoughts?

Nick: I notice a mixture of curiosity and low grade excitement in me as you explain your growing views on accessibility. I picture you looking into a widening and increasingly rich and colourful world. Yes, from what you've said, I can understand you identifying science and creativity as agents of accessibility (my adaptation of your point). Having read your words, I'm now thinking of accessibility as a collage of energetic forces, brought together through the difference of the people who are passionate about the value and integrity of gestalt principles. One component of the work as I see it is to harness these different energies into something that can be considered a cohesive whole; and turn outwards to the world beyond gestalt. I saw this at the AAGT/EAGT conference in Taormina, people coming together and creatively applying gestalt beyond its traditional borders. I felt inspired, and Meeting Point partially arose from that experience. As a now qualified gestalt counsellor (congratulations!), I wonder how you see yourself being involved in increasing access to gestalt practice or thinking?

Ayhan: Thanks Nick, it has been a challenging journey to qualify with quite a bit of heartache and lots of support along the way. I don't know yet what I can do as an individual to increase accessibility. All I notice is a curiosity of how gestalt therapy has started out and changed over time. There seem to be different layers to accessibility, such as ethnographic, linguistic, financial, and maybe even a relational dimension where connection and support might carry someone through training who wouldn't be able to get through otherwise. Issues such as gender, race, abilities, sexual orientation and diversity in general are deeply cared about within the gestalt community, but we are still a majority white, majority educated, majority privileged group of people in the UK (and very likely in Germany too). It has been challenging to own this for me, because my life in Germany felt anything but privileged as a minority. I wish there were Meeting Points when I was growing up to experience gestalt. It's good to hear the Taormina conference had such an impact on your work. I wonder what you think about privilege and gestalt therapy.

Nick: Hmm...I find that a difficult question to answer. I wonder if you could be more specific about the link between privilege and gestalt therapy that you'd like me to address.

Ayhan: My hypothesis (or bias) is that gestalt therapy training and treatment is a privilege because of a lack of accessibility. You are actively working on accessibility with Meeting
Points, so I wondered if the idea of privilege (or the absence of it) had been something you considered.

**Nick:** I believe that we all have the same basic right to be heard. Looking back, when I first entered therapy as a client, that was the first and most important issue for me. That there may be people who want therapy treatment, but don’t have access to it because of financial situations, location, cultural norms, etc (though I’m not sure psychotherapy should be proselytising to convert the masses!), seems to me somehow a deficit of compassion that we should all be looking to right. This is also a bigger issue, in that access to mental health services across the board is increasingly compromised, in the UK anyway.

Although we are strong collectively, I think responsibility starts with the individual. I heard you say that you don’t know what you can do to increase accessibility. I would like to challenge you a little on this, as it seems too easy to park it in that way. You sound passionate to me about inequality of access, either to training or to treatment; how would you like to be involved in enabling gestalt practice and thinking to be more accessible?

**Ayhan:** I like how you put it; a “deficit of compassion” makes sense in times of austerity where people need borders in order to feel safe and protected from the other, the unknown and the different. I agree with starting on an individual level and believe I started a process to understand what is going on for me by writing about accessibility. When I say I don’t know what to do about accessibility yet, I mean I have no clear idea what might be useful. I feel I don’t have enough data to come up with ideas. So I am still learning about accessibility and I have an interest in research. And there are a few biases I am aware of. One, that training and treatment is a privilege. Two, throwing money at minorities won’t solve problems, even though it may ease some of the symptoms. The UKCP has a bursary for trainees, which I find is a wonderful thing. Then in their last sentence they encourage applications from under-represented groups. To me, this is another exercise of white heteronormative power over oppressed groups. It offends me that I am expected to need money to get through training. I rather need a nurturing environment where I see people like me – the outcasts, the rebels, the different, the unwelcome – getting through the system. If they can get through, I might be able to too. Finance is really important and focusing only on minorities might be counterproductive. And third, I live in a liberal bubble with very little exposure to people who feel disenfranchised in the UK. Maybe we need more support for these groups in training and treatment. No-one throws money at them.

You see, there are lots of thoughts. I am looking out into the world from my own perspective, at this stage, uncertain where to go from here. Our dialogue really helps me to organise my thoughts and I appreciate your challenge. What’s going on for you?

**Nick:** I sense your passion and I notice a rise in my energy as I read your words; I want to respond spontaneously and in the moment. What you say highlights for me the complexity and paradox of the topic of accessibility. I notice you bringing yourself clearly into the spotlight, and am aware of how the reflections you have on yourself and your experiences lean so significantly into the dialogue we are having. This makes complete sense. I enjoy hearing from you and your experiences, and find that valuable. I think I hear that in some way you consider yourself to have access
because of matters linked to your identity, but in other ways you feel alienated. It sounds a potentially confusing place to be.

I feel a little trapped in this particular topic of access and privilege, mainly because of the ambivalence I have towards my own traditional markers of privilege, e.g. white, male, straight, middle-class. I have often turned my back on this privilege growing-up, and yet now find moving towards it liberates me.

A psychotherapist I was with earlier this year said, in relation to discussion of historical difference, prejudice, persecution, “We’ve all got to be prepared to get hurt a little”. I thought that was a very powerful insight. The question is, how do we create the conditions where we can all be heard, experience the hurt, our own and that of others, without running for cover, or fighting on the front line?

I am aware of the coming ending to our dialogue, a dialogue that I fully expect will be open ended, another paradox! I would welcome your thoughts on anything that comes up for you from the above.

Ayhan: It means a lot to me when you show your capacity to own privilege. I feel a deep sense of connection and an appreciation for our differences. A heartfelt thank you for your thoughts and ideas.

Nick: Ah...I wonder if that’s what you needed when you initially asked me to describe my thoughts about privilege and gestalt. Looking back, that was perhaps my sense, that you needed that disclosure from me. We move towards a duality, perhaps that creates some balance. I think we may be branching off into new, though related, territory! Thank you for your commitment of energy to the dialogue, to our meeting, in its grace and its messiness.

REFERENCES


---

Ayhan Alman de la Osa qualified in December 2017 in gestalt psychotherapeutic counselling and works in private practice in West London / Acton. www.almandelaosa.uk

---

Nick Adlington is a gestalt psychotherapist in training and runs his own mediation and dialogue business in West London / Brentford. www.go-dialogue.co.uk nick@go-dialogue.co.uk
THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE PNEUMENAL FIELD IN GESTALT THERAPY

by Philip Brownell

ABSTRACT

This is a response to Nils Konstantinovs’ original article in New Gestalt Voices Edition 1, July 2017, in which he explores the place of religion in gestalt therapy. It is an explanation of how field theory and dialogue allow for the inclusion of Christianity, one form of religion, at a theoretical level in gestalt therapeutic conceptualizations. It provides a resource for gestalt therapists seeking to increase their spiritual competency with regards to their clients who profess Christianity.

Keywords: Field, ontical field, phenomenal field, pneumenal field, dialogue, interoception, presence, God, religion, Christianity, gestalt therapy

BEGINNING CONSIDERATIONS

I have changed the wording in my thinking on the term “pneumatic field,” which regretfully sounded more like some kind of drill than anything else, to “pneumenal field” in order to reflect correlation with two other important terms: the ontical field and the phenomenal field. These are all ways of looking at what is. Like the Koine Greek depicting a whole person as consisting of various capacities or having diverse properties (nous or mind, sarx or flesh, soma or body, pneuma or spirit, psyche or soul), the concept of field can be considered from differing perspectives. The ontical field is all that actually exists. As I have heard someone say (and I cannot recall whom), it is the “is-ness of the situation.” The phenomenal field describes what any given person experiences while existing as a part of the ontical field—their handshake with

Konstantinovs (2017), and I want to respond to what he said.¹

¹ For the sake of this article I am assuming the existence of God. Many people won’t go there, but it’s not my purpose to argue for the existence of God. If one moves on from that argument, then there are worthwhile considerations if one assumes God exists. Perhaps those not so sure about that might “go along for the ride” as a thought experiment.
reality resulting in the aesthetics of the lived body and the accumulating sense of one’s life world. The pneumenal field is the focus narrowed yet again to the relational influence of the presence of God.2 This presence of God is what Kenneth Pargament (2007) referred to as the experience of the sacred. It is Isaiah’s sense of being utterly undone at the revelation of God (Isaiah 6:5), and it is Moses’s “fatal attraction” to the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-5). It is the mysterium tremendum (that which engenders terrible awe) and the mysterium fascinans (that which engenders irresistible attraction and fascination) all rolled into one (Otto, 1923/1958). “At the heart of the sacred lies God, divine beings, or a transcendent reality” (Pargament, 2007, p. 33).

The pneumenal field is the focus narrowed yet again to the relational influence of the presence of God. This presence of God is what Kenneth Pargament (2007) referred to as the experience of the sacred. It is Isaiah’s sense of being utterly undone at the revelation of God (Isaiah 6:5), and it is Moses’s “fatal attraction” to the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-5). It is the mysterium tremendum (that which engenders terrible awe) and the mysterium fascinans (that which engenders irresistible attraction and fascination) all rolled into one (Otto, 1923/1958). “At the heart of the sacred lies God, divine beings, or a transcendent reality” (Pargament, 2007, p. 33).

So, let me spend a little more time with each of these field perspectives, because I contend they are all proceeding and evolving as the process of gestalt therapy unfolds, and they provide an orienting scaffolding for the gestalt therapist engaged in spiritually integrated gestalt psychotherapy. Then, I want to come back to the issue of the presence of God more directly conceived.

THE ONTICAL FIELD

This is what actually exists. It is amenable to change by virtue of a number of influences, but what it is not is a constantly morphing and relative construction, one’s version of reality, one’s interpretation of experience, one’s analysis of data, one’s subjective truth. The ontical field transcends its subjects even while forming partially by their actions. It is

In gestalt therapy we meet a transcendent Other (Levinas, 1999), another person who cannot be conceptualized, modeled, imagined or otherwise thematized without doing that other person an ethical injustice. That is because apart from the self-disclosure, the self-revealing that the other provides through his or her presence, one simply constructs the other, interpreting and imagining the other out of the raw material in one’s own ground. Thus, the other becomes a subjective “same” (i.e. same as oneself). When a therapist leaves behind the alterity of the client in order to make sense out of that person, the client, that unique and transcendent other, is to some degree lost.

What is the point? It is simply this: we meet an actual other who can be known, and that other is a touch point in the ontical field. How must we meet that person? We make an ethical meeting with the client by validating his or her presence through an increasingly intense and sustained dialogue. It is a critical realist perspective nicely described by N. T. Wright (1992):

I propose a form of critical realism. This is a way of describing the process of “knowing” that acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence, “realism”), while fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known (hence “critical”). (p. 35)

Thus, the ontical field “talks back.” It constrains our imaginations and disallows our inclinations. And that is the same for the divine Other. God is a being who cares

2 I am speaking here as a Christian. I will leave it to other colleagues to explicate their understandings of spirituality in gestalt therapy as that pertains to other religious and spiritual cultures. I know there are other perspectives.
about being known, and so He “talks back” to our imaginations about Him. In terms of His transcendence Levinas (1998) asserted that God is not simply the first other, or even:

the “other par excellence,” or the “absolutely other,” but other than the other, other otherwise, and other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical obligation to the other and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence...

(p. 69)

Certainly, that is what it seems like sometimes. Jesus spoke from the cross and asked where his Father might be and why He had abandoned Him. Yet, God is not simply transcendent. He is also immanent, present. Simply because God is transcendent does not mean God does not exist. Nor does it mean that God has no practical existence, that God is not with.

There are times of darkness when God seems far:

“Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1)

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.” (Ps. 22:1)

“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” (Ps. 13:1)

There are times of tremendous insight when God seems to fill one's entire horizon:

“I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me and heard my cry.”
He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay,
And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.” (Ps. 40:1,2)

How lovely are Your dwelling places,
O Lord of hosts!
For the Lord God is a sun and a shield;
The Lord gives grace and glory;
No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.
O Lord of hosts,
How blessed is the man who trusts in You!
(Ps.84:1, 11 & 12)

In a dream God revealed Himself to Jacob, saying, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:15) That statement, at a particular time just after Jacob had received Isaac's blessing, is very similar to the statement made by Christ, just before His ascension: I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

In the gospel of John, a convoluted section describes an important way in which God is present with people. Jesus speaks to His disciples, saying:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also.

3 I do not want to get into the arguments for the existence of God here; I assume that God does exist and so speak from that perspective.
In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. (John 14:16-20)

This is a section relating to the theology of the trinity in Christianity. All three persons of the godhead are mentioned: Father, Jesus (the Son), and the Holy Spirit (“Spirit of truth”). This is an assertion about the ontical field. Jesus was saying, “This is the way it is. I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. That is the way in which things will be”. That constrains the phenomenality of those who have believed in Christ and received the Holy Spirit. God is constantly in, with, and toward these people. They have an intimate relationship with God. So, then the question becomes, “How is this situation experienced?” It is as valid a question, phenomenologically, and just as much so as anything the French phenomenologists have been dealing with (Janicaud, et al., 2001).

**THE PHENOMENAL FIELD**

The experience of the client is of paramount concern for gestalt therapists. As such, that process of experiencing from a unique position in the ontical field, embodied as a unique person with a unique perspective, has influenced gestalt therapists to abandon the idea of anything real outside what can be constructed and interpreted. It is a perspectival sense of being, which is different for each person. In that view the ontical field may exist but cannot be known and becomes little more than a rhetorical tool, the relic of a bygone philosophy of science, or a poetic metaphor.

Gianni Francesetti (forthcoming) forsakes such a poetical, radically constructivist take on the field, claiming that the field is not a mere metaphor. He claims it is something real and something that produces effects. He claims that it exists with an ontological status. He further asserts that the phenomenal field “is the ecstasy of the present situation, of the lived bodies that come into play in the situation” (np.). Indeed, he is attracted to the concept of atmospheres, the re-enchantment of existence through the presence of experiential phenomena (implying, indivisibly, the lived body and the phenomenal field) that are “almost-entities that constantly vibrate in the in-between” (np.).

When such esteemed gestalt theorists abandon the naturalistic world view and allow for the ethereal but actual presence of “almost-entities,” upon what ground can a person maintain that spiritual entities do not exist or that essentially spiritual experiences are not substantial in and of themselves as spiritual?

The apostle John stated, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24, NASB) In other words, since God is spirit, one must adore Him in spirit, as He actually, truthfully is. Contact with God is made possible through the medium of spirit, which can be understood as a capacity of the whole human being for relationship with God.

The language of enchantment reminds me of James, K.A. Smith's (2014) commentary on Charles Taylor's (2007) book, *A Secular Age*. Smith asserts that Taylor accurately described the current age as a time in which culture has become disenchanted, unable to imagine anything that cannot be measured, commercialized, or consumed. Accordingly, this take on reality asserts that the brain is the mind, that soul and spirit do not exist, and that everything can be understood...
by recourse to a materialist/physicalist explanation.

To imagine a reality infused with spirit is to become re-enchanted. Indeed, to imagine the re-enchantment of gestalt therapy, in which God is present as a third in the therapeutic field, is to discover a potential that was actually there all along.

An example:

“David” came to me for depression. He was in is early fifties, married, with no children. His marriage was not satisfying, and his wife complained that he did not please her (in several ways). He said he came to me because in my bio he noticed that I had a seminary background and was a Christian. He told me he prayed for God to give him relief from his depression, and he hoped I would be the answer.

When someone comes to me because they believe they will find a sympathetic ear, a therapist who understands their spiritual commitments, I consider that to be providential (organized by the God Who is present in both lives).

I asked David, “When you talk to God, what do you get back?”
He looked puzzled.
I said, “People say that prayer is talking with God, but it’s not a monologue. It’s not a speech made to God. It’s a conversation. So, I’m curious what you get back. Can you hear from God?”
He waited. Then he said, “I don’t usually tell people this. Sometimes I have thoughts that come quickly. They don’t seem to be mine.” “And you think that is God talking to you?” “I wonder.”

He wondered as if contemplating a strange possibility that would leave him crazy or having just gone down the rabbit hole into a whole new reality. He was playing with enchantment—the possibility of the presence of God. Phenomenally enchantment is the giddy feeling that puts a smile on one’s face when he or she realizes God might be real, available, and present, and this “Christian thing” might be true. Really true. C.S. Lewis (1955) called that experience “joy.”

THE PNEUMENAL FIELD

Jesus claimed that in his presence and in the power of the Holy Spirit the kingdom of God had come upon the people to whom He was speaking. Sylvia Crocker (1999) claimed that a field is a sphere of influence, and so the pneumenal field is the sphere of the influence of God, in which He reigns and is both transcendent, being above His creation, and immanent, being present in and with His creation.

These kinds of statements I’ve been making must sound like dead points of doctrine to some people, the church-speak from centuries of interpreting ancient texts, rehearsed in Bible studies and seminary classrooms. What do they have to do with two people meeting one another in gestalt therapy? The pneumenal field brings together both the objective fact, the reality of God, and the subjective, interpreted experience of God, and that is so for two people meeting within the scope, the sphere of God’s influence—including the therapy room. It’s His world, His creation, and we are His creatures. We are in and of Him. We exist and abide because He holds us together. As Paul of Tarsus told the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens
24 The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. 25 From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 26 so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28 For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’…(New Revised Standard Version)

Indeed. Martin Buber (1952/1988) stated that God is a being who is not indifferent to being known, and religion “is essentially the act of holding fast to God. And that does not mean holding fast to an image that one has made of God, nor even holding fast to the faith in God that one has conceived. It means holding fast to the existing God” (p. 123).

So, I am talking about the experience of the presence of God—contact with divinity. It is the subjective experience of the sacred (Seidlitz et al., 2002), the spiritually transcendent experience that is a “modification of consciousness that extends beyond the ordinary vicissitudes of everyday life” (O’Grady & Bartz, 2012).

**PNEUMENAL FIELD DYNAMICS**

If a phenomenal field is one’s experience as a situated aspect of the ontical field, and if the phenomenal field is tantamount to one’s life world, then the pneumenal field is one’s spiritual world, a dimension of the life world with its own horizon and attitudes. Further, the nature of the ontical field constrains the phenomenal field (hence also the pneumenal field). Since God is of the ontical field (because He exists), the nature of his presence takes effect. He is immanent within the field even while transcending it. He is Creator, more than His creation, even while He is present in and toward it. The nature of God, God’s expression, and God’s actions in the ontical field affect and constrain every pneumenal field within it.

**FLUCTUATING IMMANENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE**

Is it a wave, or is it a particle? Is it matter or energy? According to the theory of wave-particle duality it’s both; particles have properties of waves, and waves have properties of particles. Energy is also matter. So, it’s not that immanence is also transcendence. That is not what I am saying. Rather, they both resolve in the person of God, and He is both.

People have been considering the immanence and transcendence issue with regard to divinity for a long time, and for some it is an either/or consideration. Either God is so holy in His nature as spirit that he cannot have anything to do with an imperfect, tainted physicality such as earth and human bodies, or He is so present with us that His divinity becomes diluted, if not polluted, and then the idea of divinity itself becomes common. But with regards to God’s nature and relationship with humankind, He is both transcendent and immanent—holiness incarnate. God with us. Just as two properties (particle and wave) can exist in the same space, when people encounter God they sense his presence, but that brings with
it the sense that God is utterly wondrous. When one senses God's presence the experience is both wonderful and terrible. Thus, the pneumenal field includes two very different kinds of experience, and although they are both consistent with encounter of the person of God, phenomenally one does not experience them simultaneously. They shimmer like heat waves over hot ground.

SPIRITUAL HORIZON

The horizon in phenomenology, and thus in gestalt therapy, consists of all that one conceives, imagines, or believes is possible. If it seems possible, one can consider it. That is, one can intend it—make it the aboutness of experience and realize its significance for one’s life. If something does not exist in one’s horizon, it never occurs to the person, is not noticed by the person, and thus is not experienced in a conscious way. That does not mean it is not experienced; it just means that the significance of it is accounted for and attributed to other means or causes that do exist in the person’s horizon. Thus, a materialist would not naturally contemplate spiritual things. Some have said that the two worldviews are so widely disparate that people holding to them could not have a meaningful discussion. In gestalt therapy, however, if the two shared a dialogical attitude, there could be a meaningful discussion between a materialistic person and a spiritual person in which curiosity and perspective taking affected one another’s horizons.

SPIRITUAL ATTITUDES

An attitude in phenomenology can be conceived of as a zone of interest. As such it is what cues a person to invest energy, pay attention, initiate or support contact, and otherwise build out an aspect of his or her life world in a particular direction. I will not take a lot of space to develop various spiritual attitudes associated with the pneumenal field, but brief mention is needed to illustrate that there could be numerous attitudes involved. Also, as must be evident by now, I’m speaking from a theistic, Christian perspective.

(The following is not an exhaustive list.)

The spiritual attitude of worship. When people feel overcome with some feature of God’s character or works and then are both drawn toward Him and drawn to ascribe value to Him, that is worship. You cannot schedule it. You can say you’re going to have a worship service, but you cannot be sure it will happen. That is because worship is a response to the person of God, response to some kind of revelation of God, and that is a dialogical experience that elicits a dialogical response. Just as one cannot aim at producing an I-Thou moment, one cannot predict and “accomplish” the goal of worshipful experience. Those moments come and go like dialogical moments. The best one can do is simply to let go and flow with them.

The spiritual attitude of service. Jesus provided a wonderful example of service when he washed the feet of his disciples at the last supper. What strikes me about him is that he was always teaching, and that seemed to be a teachable moment. Instead of merely lecturing, simply telling them, he acted it out. His pedagogy was even laced with service. It seems to me that God’s method is experiential.

Phenomenally, the pneumenal field is
saturated with people serving, and so either being filled with the desire to serve or feeling gratitude for the service of others.

**The spiritual attitude of sacrifice.** Unlike Buddhism, Christianity does not disdain suffering. In fact, in Christianity there is value to enduring challenges, trials, difficulty and the sacrifice one must make in responding to priorities taught by God. They don’t usually fit with the secular values of one’s society. Paradoxically, one often gains through sacrificial loss. So, there is interest in such things, because they are difficult.

**The spiritual attitude of growth.** In Christianity “salvation” is conceived in two ways. One is a point decision to invest one’s self in the sacrificial atonement of Christ, but the other is the linear process of growth in Christ likeness. Christianity is essentially a growth model. The presence of God stimulates such progressive sanctification. The ontical field is filled with various stimuli all aimed at stimulating and nurturing one’s growth. In fact, one form of service is to help facilitate that growth in others, and that is called discipleship. This growth model, communicated in many ways, constrains the phenomenal field and thus stamps the pneumenal field with a sense of purpose and frugality. How one uses the time in this world, for we are all passing through it, becomes one concern.

**Interoception of the spirit.** In a previous place I wrote, “How might a person experience contact with God? It is a kind of touching; it is an impression with similarities to the interoceptive/proprionic sensing described above. Yet, it is touch of another kind. I suggest an interoception of the spirit ...” (Brownell, 2016).

Interoception is the awareness of internal bodily processes. It is linked to basic self-regulation. For instance, interoceptors (interoceptive neurons) are involved when one needs to take a deep breath or stretch. The knowledge that one needs to stretch is not deduced. It simply comes fully upon a person at once and then one stretches.

In the same way, there is an interoception of the spirit in which one knows that he or she knows. If one hears from God, it comes all at once as an impression, an inner sense, an interoception, or as some have described it, a “still small voice.” This interoception of the spirit is critical to the dialogical relationship with God. Or, as Dallas Willard (1999), former professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California, put it, “In the still small voice of God we are given a message that bears the stamp of his personality quite clearly and in a way we will learn to recognize. But in contrast with other cases, the medium thorough which the message comes is diminished almost to the vanishing point, taking the form of thoughts that are our thoughts, though these thoughts are not from us” (p. 87).

**CONCLUSION**

I appreciated Nils’ article in the first edition of New Gestalt Voices. I thought it was courageous of him to write it and of the staff to publish it. As he mentioned, religion is not universally met with acceptance in some circles of gestalt practitioners. In fact, some of them believe it has no place in the theory and practice of gestalt therapy. The patient can bring it in if he or she must, but the therapist should not inquire.
In the face of that an international research team (Brownell, Reck, & Zeleskov-Djoric, et al., 2017), consisting of 12 cohorts of gestalt practitioner-researchers from Europe, Russia, Australia, Chile, Mexico, the USA and other countries, have just embarked upon a three-year exploration of faith, awareness (or spiritual sensitivity), and spontaneity (or availability) in gestalt therapy. The study has been funded by the John Templeton Foundation, and it examines each of those constructs or processes through the perspectives of Christianity, Buddhism, and non-religious oriented gestalt therapy.

I have maintained (Brownell, 2015) that it is a matter of cultural competence to address religion and spirituality with the client. In so doing, the gestalt therapist needs to appreciate the world view of the client and not simply patronize the client. Dialogue in gestalt therapy requires the therapist to include the perspective of the client, and that perspective for Christians includes belief in the ontological existence of God, making God an ontical consideration and then of the field. Second is the inclusion of the client's interface with God. This cannot be reworked in the mind of the therapist into something like, “The client thinks he (or she) talks with God and hears back from God, but ...(that could not happen because God does not exist).” If the therapist is defending against that real possibility of God because of the therapist's world view, it will leak out eventually. No. The exploration must be more like, “What is it like for you to converse with God?” “What does it mean to you that God is really there with you?” Not, “What is it like for you to think you are talking with God?” or “What's the significance for you to believe God is there with you?” The presence of God is a crucial given for both field dynamics and dialogue for patients who profess a relationship with God.

So, thank you to Nils Konstantinovs and the staff of New Gestalt Voices for the original article and also for this opportunity to respond.

REFERENCES


**Philip Brownell** MDiv, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist licensed in North Carolina and Idaho. He is an ordained clergyman and former pastor. After receiving his doctorate in clinical psychology from an APA accredited program, he spent eleven years living and working as a registered psychologist in Bermuda before joining Family Health Services of Idaho, an integrated health care organization. He is a writer and a leader in the global research movement for gestalt therapy, and he is the Principal Investigator for a three-year, funded research project titled Spiritually-Integrated Processes in Gestalt Therapy. Phil lives with his wife Linda and their 14 cats and one dog on a small ranch near the rim of the Snake River Canyon, above Shoshone Falls, Twin Falls, Idaho. drphilipbrownell@gmail.com
Having been socialized into the critical theory tradition, Hartmut Rosa, professor of sociology and political science at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, remains loyal to the well-established convention of understanding capitalist modernity as a wrong mode of existence. Nevertheless, his 2016 book ‘Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung’, which translates as ‘Resonance: A Sociology of the Relationship to the World’, offers a new theoretical foundation that focuses on the concepts of resonance and the self/world relation.

The ground for this new epistemological approach had already been laid in his earlier books. In ‘Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity’ and in ‘Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality’ he argues that a modern capitalist society can only stabilize itself dynamically. It systematically requires growth, acceleration and increase of innovation in order to reproduce its structural status quo. Although the dynamics mainly come through temporality, speed is not a problem per se. It is only a problem when it leads to different forms of alienation. The question remains, therefore, where the motivational energy comes from to keep enough growth, acceleration and innovation on an individual level?
The concept of resonance in this respect is a modification and extension of Axel Honneth’s concept of recognition. Like Honneth, Rosa’s mentor, or Charles Taylor (whose political philosophy was at the core of Rosa’s dissertation thesis), Rosa here seeks to combine social analysis and political philosophy with an interest in subject formation. For Rosa, resonance is the very process through which we are formed as subjects and through which the world we encounter and experience is constituted. Last but not least, he is inspired by Taylor’s phenomenological approach to social life, deriving mainly from Merleau-Ponty.

The reviewed book consists of an introduction, four main parts and in place of an epilogue, the author’s response to the criticism of resonance theory.

In the introduction, Hartmut Rosa discusses his theory of the self/world relation derived from phenomenology, as well as its links to sociology, social theory and modernity. It is based on a strong phenomenological statement that basic experience is prior to the subject/object split: “something is present” (Merleau-Ponty, 1965), and this presence is an embodied, aesthetic experience. As in Taylor’s writings there is no subject/object dualism, instead, priority is given to the in-between, the constitutive interpretation. At this point, and later in the book, Rosa refers to the inspiration he drew from an abundance of various sources – from mirror neuron research, through Peter Sloterdijk’s depiction of the symbiotic relationship between a mother and her baby (Sloterdijk, 1998), to Bruno Latour (Latour, 2013) and his recent book on modes of existence. The latter, Rosa points out, articulates views that are very similar to his own conception of religion, one that has nothing to do with a cognitive belief-structure. Instead, being religious means being in a mode of existence in which one feels essentially connected to something out there that has the power to transform us. Rosa takes a similar phenomenological approach: what is our way of experiencing the world and constructing worlds?

In the first part of the book, Rosa introduces resonance and alienation as the main concepts of the self/world relation. The pretext for this discussion is his argument that conceptions of justice are insufficient as normative concepts for the endeavor of critical theory. Even though he is convinced that the distribution of the means, products and profits of production in modern capitalist society is unjust, the main problem is that life is based on a wrong mode of relating to the world.

For Rosa, alienation is not the so-called ‘artists’ critique’ (Künstlerkritik: Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm) of capitalist society, which we can address once we have brought an end to all economic injustice. It is the other way round: the wrong mode of being is responsible for the possibility of exploitation and injustice. In critical theory as well as in other critical approaches there is a well-established convention of interpreting modernity as problematic precisely due to its effect of alienation, dis-enchantment – silencing the world. However, the problem is that critical theory has so far failed to

1 The artist’s critique, or rather the Frankfurt School critique, concentrated basically on analysis of ‘the ruling understandings’ generated in bourgeois society, in order to show how they served to legitimize the existing status quo. It is sometimes called the artist’s critique as their task was mainly to interpret the areas of society Marx had not dealt with, especially in the superstructure of society.
demonstrate sufficiently what a different way or mode of being in the world could look like.

One suggested alternative mode of being is ‘authenticity’; this, however, Rosa claims, depends too much on identification, and ties communities and individuals to certain forms of life. Autonomy does not really work as ‘alienation’s other’ either, for sometimes we are completely autonomous but totally alienated, and sometimes we lose control, we are overwhelmed and are not alienated at all. Resonance for that matter means becoming vulnerable and losing control. It is something that happens in the inter-space, between ‘actors’ in Bruno Latour’s sense, or it is ‘intra-action’ as described by Karen Barads (Barads, 2012).

Nevertheless, alienation is not the opposite of resonance. Rosa regards it as being in a dialectical relationship with resonance. For resonance is not consonance, it requires an active presence of something that is beyond our grasp, elusive, and in this sense remains alien. It therefore must involve difference and transformation, and has no reifying implications.

In this part of the book the author also ventures further into the intricacies of the self/world relationship, going beyond the cognitive aspect and concentrating on its various physiological and emotional aspects. When you are in resonance, when you feel that the thing you interact with is important, then it speaks to you, it touches and affects you. Therefore this is one side of a resonant relationship: you are touched, affected (Af<-ection). On the other hand, however, you also have the capacity for experiencing self-efficacy (E->motion). You reach out to the other side, too. You are non-alienated from your work, for example, or from people with whom you interact, when you manage to have a responsive, transformative, non-instrumental relationship with them, a resonant relationship. In other words, resonance is synonymous with basic entanglement in the world; it is the process through which self and the world are constituted and shaped. All human beings are ‘resonant beings’; Rosa says that we do not need to learn to resonate, even though we might unlearn it or lose our capacity for entering into resonant relationships.

In part two of the book, three different axes or dimensions of resonance are distinguished. One is horizontal, or social resonance, i.e. resonance between human beings. We find it in relationships of love, in friendship, but also in our understanding of true democracy. The second dimension of resonance is material, or diagonal. This dimension contains resonant forms of a relationship with the world of objects and artifacts, such as work, for example. And finally, there is the vertical dimension of resonance, which is about our relationship with life, or the world, or the universe – existential resonance. Describing it, the author uses Karl Jaspers’ term “das Umgreifende” (the encompassing or totality) denoting that we always need to have a sense of how we relate to the world as a whole, as a totality.

Part three of the book encapsulates the perception from critical theory as well as from other critical approaches of capitalist society, and modernity even beyond capitalism, that these are epochs operating in a way geared towards instrumental efficiency, a mode of silent, instrumental relationship with the world.
The author’s contention is that a lot of modern literature and philosophy (Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche) is the expression of the ultimate fear of modernity that the world will fall utterly silent. Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka and other writers he analyzes in this part narrate a self-world-relationship in which all axes of resonance are silent and dead. Cognitively and rationally speaking, Rosa continues his argument: for us, who are living in modernity, the silence of the universe is inescapable, it appears to be dead, irresponsible matter. But people like Latour or Philippe Descola (Descola, 2013) say that this is a very strange and historically unique way of looking at the world around us. It might be part of the problem of our current cultural predicament, and not just a simple truth.

Not knowing what the world really is, we can nonetheless scrutinize the ways in which we experience it and relate to it, even against our cognitive rational convictions. Through our enacted conception and perception of nature, through our conception of history, through our conception of art, we potentially redevelop axes of resonance with the world as a totality. Rosa suggests that there is clearly a strong social need for a thorough analysis and critique of modern society: for an approach capable of integrating political, psychological, philosophical and sociological perspectives into a powerful critique of what has gone wrong in our world.

In the fourth part, Rosa elaborates on the ‘Triple A Approach’ to the world, constitutive of his understanding of modernity. We implicitly believe, he says, that a good life consists in making more of the world available, attainable and accessible. This counters what he calls, on a structural level, the mode of dynamic stabilization – the need of modern societies for progressive growth, acceleration and innovation – as conditions for reproducing their social structure and maintaining the status quo. These realms change their character with time, though persist as fundamental pathologies built into the social fabric of modern society (Adorno, Marcuse). With this ‘structural’ mode of dynamic stabilization, Rosa continues, there is a complementary mode of cultural orientation. As subjects, we try to bring the world within our horizon of control and calculability. As a result, self and world turn cold and indifferent. The alternative to the mode of dynamic stabilization is the mode of resonance. We need to replace this stance, geared towards control and calculation, with a new way of relating to the world based on listening and responding.

Hartmut Rosa associates the concept of resonance with those contemporary scholars representing different disciplines (philosophy: Lambert Wiesing, psychiatry and psychotherapy: Thomas Fuchs, neuroscience: Vittorio Gallese) who turn to phenomenology and claim that every human contact with the world contains both the component of meaning and of presence. In this sense, they all have a profound impact on their fields of analysis, embracing a specific epistemology that foregrounds the fundamental relational nature of humans. It is in and from relationship that the ‘I’ and the world emerge as two poles (Husserl, quoted in Wiesing, 2014, p.73). There are three main characteristics of this relationship: the ‘I’ and the world are co-original (in the sense that they emerge together), they are reciprocal (in the sense that there is no subject without the world and without a subject there is no world); and they are different (in the sense
that they are not identical and they are each defined on the basis of their reciprocal otherness) (Wiesing, quoted in Francesetti, 2016).

Reciprocity and difference are indeed at the core of Hartmut Rosa's thinking of resonance, being both a descriptive and a normative notion. Seeking a holistic social theory, Rosa also perceives resonance as the foundation of a monistic moral philosophy. Like Levinas, Rosa, seems not to be giving up individual autonomy, but trying to radicalize it, deepen it by calling into question the experience of heteronomy (Levinas, 1961).

You are non-alienated, the author of ‘Resonance’ says, when you listen (Af<fection) and respond (E>motion), when you manage to have a responsive, transformative, non-instrumental relationship to something that is beyond your grasp. This puts Rosa in line with thinkers who wish to go beyond the goal that is ultimate for many philosophers, from left to right, from Marx to Heidegger, namely some kind of concept of autonomy. This so-called ‘autonomy orthodoxy’ is necessary in any ethics, yet not sufficient to the experience of affect, dependency, or connectedness that might begin to address the problem of motivation in moral and political life (Critchley, 2007). Resonance cannot yet be enforced, guaranteed or controlled. The attempt, Rosa argues, to turn the world into a sphere of encompassing resonance would not only lead to totalitarian politics, it would destroy the possibility of hearing the voice of the Other, and thus discern one’s own voice in the long run. Similarly, Simon Critchley in his ‘Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance’ claims that the demand has for the most part been a repressive demand; it is not a question of being liberated from it but an issue of how one can think about restructuring that demand and making it one's own (Critchley, 2007).

The above mentioned argument against autonomy orthodoxy within contemporary philosophy seems related to Hartmut Rosa's critique of contemporary literature and philosophy, and their implied ultimate fear that with modernity the world will fall utterly silent. Indeed, the concept of resonance embodies a ‘hermeneutics of trust’ (Ricoeur, Gadamer) as opposed to a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ (Ricoeur). This latter tradition, started by ‘the three great destroyers’ (Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud) and involving interpreting, reading people’s motives in search of their emancipation from power structures and practices, has in fact created a worldless subject. “...if the world is to be thought of as a product constituted by a subject, then this subject cannot himself be thought of as part of the world” (Wiesing, 2014, p.108). Rosa's concept of silencing the world in philosophy may therefore be read in the light of a critique of the interpretationism tendency present in contemporary philosophy (Wiesing, 2014). It is considered by some rigorous critics not only as a philosophical position but as a cultural symptom, a symptomatic mind, when the world is treated as a text. “Having abandoned the ideal of reaching a naked, rock-bottom, unmediated God's-eye view of reality, we seem impelled to embrace the opposite position, that we see everything through an interpretive veil or from an interpretive angle” (Shusterman, 1990, p.181).
REFERENCES


Kamila Bialy is a gestalt therapist, and an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology of Culture, University of Lodz, Poland. Her field of scientific interest includes sociology of culture, sociology of knowledge, and phenomenological critiques of culture.

kamila.bialy@gmail.com
Dear Desperate in N1,

I am sorry to hear about your discordant relationship with the squirrels. However, let me share the wisdom of Miriam and Erving Polster (1973, 99), “If we insist doggedly on our territorial rights, we run the risk of reducing the exciting contact with the other and wasting away”.

DiN1 (if I may call you that), though you are employing different, even polarised, approaches to the problem at hand, that you see the squirrels as a problem is the problem in the first place. Are you following me?

I strongly suggest trawling back through your past until you find the squirrel trauma that surely underpins your hostile approach to the little furry friends. Was your mother a squirrel? I can’t help but think that there is unfinished business and a couple of fixed gestalts scurrying around your back garden.

I also note that you insist on ‘doing’ something with your problem. I suggest you lie on your back in the garden, coated in nut oil, and embrace the paradoxical theory of change. If this proves to be in any way arousing, I recommend you consult a doctor immediately.

DiN1, if all else fails, change the field conditions and move to a flat on the 24th floor of a nearby tower block. Or marry one of them, though one that preferably doesn’t look like your mother.

I think that should cover it. Bon chance, mon ami.

Dr Fake Pearls
New Gestalt Voices would never have got off the ground without tremendous support from the international gestalt community, not only those involved directly but also many other therapists, coaches, trainers, and organisational practitioners who have donated funds. Below, you'll find a list of people and organisations whose generosity enabled us to set up the website and publish the first two issues of the journal.

We intend to continue operating on a very tight budget. While members of the NGV team give their time freely, there are still unavoidable costs we must meet in running the website and publishing each edition of the journal. If you feel inclined to make a donation, it would be very helpful and much appreciated!

If you represent a training organisation, or offer workshops, events or services for practitioners and trainees, we’re happy to feature an advert in our events and notices section, both on the website and in the journal, in return for your support.

If you’re reading this in a PDF, simply click on the image on this page, which will link through to PayPal, and then insert the amount you’d like to give. Otherwise, you can donate via the link on our website.

Friends of NGV

Claire Asherson Bartram
Piotr Mierkowski
Chris O’Malley
Jean-Marie Robine
Anette Krogh
David Picó-Vila
Michelle Seely
Laura Carite
Peter Philippson
Ula Sroda
Ayhan Alman de la Osa
Anika Wycislik
Ansel Woldt
Robert Resnick
Dan Bloom
Christine Dukes
Bernadette O’Koon
Mark Winitsky
Susanne Niedrum
Adam Smith
Melanie Somerville
Helen Thomas
Maria Grigorieva
Svetlana Vasilyeva

Hilary Holford
Cathy Gray
TraceyKay Coe
Eva Gold

Relational Change
Marie-Anne Chidiac & Sally Denham-Vaughan
Pacific Gestalt Institute
Lynne Jacobs & Gary Yontef
Athina Gestalt Foundation
Welsh Psychotherapy Partnership
In time, it’s likely we will set standard rates for advertising in the journal and on the NGV website. At present, however, we’re offering this service in return for a donation to help fund our running costs – whatever amount you feel is appropriate. If you would like to place an advertisement or post a notice, or have any queries about this, please email: sally@newgestaltvoices.org
AN INVITATION
Please consider completing the online survey via this link: http://bit.ly/GIRLsurvey

The Qualtrics GIRL Survey contains questions about your therapeutic orientation and experience, your here and now emotions, and the 100-item Gestalt Inventory of Resistance Loadings (GIRL© 2015, A. Woldt & K. Prosnick).

Your participation will provide data for the ongoing research of seven Gestalt styles of contact and resistance processes: Confluence, Desensitization, Introjection, Projection, Retroflection, Deflection and Egotism. This will contribute to continuing research on Gestalt personality theory and its clinical and educational applications.

The inventory is approved by Kent State University's IRB for level one research on human subjects. Participants' identities are coded and remain anonymous. It takes about 30-45 minutes to complete.

Upon completion of the survey, your seven GIRL raw scores will be calculated and displayed on the survey screen, which can be printed or copied if you want to gain awareness of their meaning, in which case, email awoldt1@kent.edu.

Should you be interested in using the Qualtrics GIRL Survey for an MA thesis, PhD dissertation or other research projects, please email Ansel about joining our research team: awoldt1@kent.edu

Dr Ansel L. Woldt
Emeritus Professor, Kent State University
Associate Faculty, Gestalt Institute of Cleveland
Practice in Psychology & Counseling, Kent, Ohio, USA
CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM
RELATIONAL GESTALT PSYCHOTHERAPY
Athens, Greece | March - April 2018

Gestalt Foundation, Psychotherapy and Training Center, offers a continuing education program for the academic year 2017-2018 on *Relational Gestalt Psychotherapy*. This program (a total of 50 hours) will be conducted in English at the Gestalt Foundation premises in Athens, and comprises a series of three workshops.

1st Workshop: Saturday 3rd & Sunday 4th March (10:00 – 18:00)
*Navigating the journey between Good and Evil: Gestalt Psychotherapy as Praxis of Discernment*

Coordinator: **Dr Sally Denham-Vaughan**
International Trainer, Psychotherapist, Registered Training Supervisor

2nd Workshop: Saturday 31st March & Sunday 1st April (10:00 – 18:00)
*The Suffering Stranger: from Intersubjectivity to the Hermeneutics of Trust*

Coordinator: **Donna M. Orange, Ph.D., Psy.D. Ph.D. in philosophy**
Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis

3rd Workshop: Friday 20th April (17:00 – 21:00), Saturday 21st & Sunday 22nd April (10:00 – 17:00)
*The field perspective in clinical practice: Towards a theory of therapeutic phronesis*

Coordinator: **Gianni Francesetti**
Psychiatrist, Gestalt therapist, international trainer and supervisor

Please contact us for details!
email: athina@gestaltfoundation.gr
www.gestaltfoundation.gr
GESTALT GROUPS IN LONDON

www.gestaltworks.co.uk

SATURDAY GROUP | monthly
with Claire Asherson Bartram

This group has been meeting regularly for over 12 years. It is a forum for self-discovery and personal development; an opportunity to talk about your family and personal issues, explore options and gain support. It runs for a whole day from 10.00am to 5.30pm. The format of a Saturday once a month, provides continuity with space for life between groups.

TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY GROUPS
with Claire Asherson Bartram and Angelika Wienrich

These are fortnightly Gestalt groups, meeting for two hours in the evening.

Therapy rooms to rent in North London, suitable for groups and individuals (www.hampsteadheaththerapyrooms.co.uk)

For further information on groups or rooms, email: clairebartram21@gmail.com
www.gestaltworks.co.uk
Roczny Program Gestalt Therapy dla Profesjonalistów w Rzeszowie

Cykl czterech 3-dniowych spotkań seminaryjno-warsztatowych
Prowadzący: Piotr Mierkowski i Ewa Canert-Łaka
Data rozpoczęcia: 24 Luty 2018, ITEG Rzeszów


Ze względu na odkrywczość i ponadczasowy humanistyczny przekaz książki, znanej w środowisku gestaltystów jako „PHG” - od pierwszych liter nazwiska jej autorów, duża część szkolenia zostanie poświęcona dokładnemu studiowaniu jej zawartości, linijka po linijce, włącznie z krytyczną dyskusją przekazów w niej zawartych.

Powszechnie wiadomo, iż język w jakim „PHG” została napisana, nie należy do najłatwiejszych i nie pozwala na automatyczną interpretację jej zawartości. Wręcz przeciwnie, książka ta wymaga od czytelnika pełnej koncentracji i zaangażowania, a zawarte w niej sprzeczności i niespójności, prowadzą do rozważań, eksperymentów i dyskusji, dzięki którym rozwija się indywidualne rozumienie i ucieleśnienie jej przekazu oraz wzrasta świadomość nas samych i otaczającej nas rzeczywistości.

Oprócz wspólnego „przezuwania” źródłowego tekstu, Program obejmuje pracę terapeutyczną, demonstracje i superwizję przypadków oraz filmy, które pozwolą na lepsze poznanie początków terapii Gestalt i życia jej twórców. Podstawową metodą będzie praca w grupie oparta na wspólnie poszukiwaniu rozumienia, nadawaniu indywidualnego znaczenia, odkrywaniu siebie i swoich zasobów oraz kształtowanie własnego stylu bycia psychoterapeutą w współczesnej sytuacji w Polsce.

Prowadzenie warsztatów:

**Ewa Canert-Łaka**, PTPG, EAGT, psychoterapeuta i supervizor, certyfikowany trener (FORGE); współzałożyciel i pierwszy prezes PTPG (2005-2014). Od 23 lat szkoli i prowadzi psychoterapią indywidualną i grupową w ramach prywatnej praktyki.

**Piotr Mierkowski**, UKCP, BACP, mgr psychoterapii Gestalt, psycholog, certyfikowany terapeuta par, supervizor i trener. Od 1991 r. prowadzi prywatną praktykę w Londynie. Były dyrektor-consultant Gestalt Centre London; członek AAGT i UKAGP.

Zapraszamy wszystkich psychoterapeutów, którzy chcą poszerzać swoją wiedzę na temat Terapii Gestalt: terapeutów gestalt oraz psychoterapeutów reprezentujących inne podejścia, psychiatrów, specjalistów counsellingu i coachingu, psychologów, oraz studentów dwóch ostatnich lat szkół psychoterapii. **Grupa liczy max 15 osób.**

Informacja: biuro@gestalt-iteg.pl

**Termy i tematyka kolejnych spotkań:**
- **24-26 lutego 2018** – Wprowadzenie do PHG i historyczno-społeczny kontekst.
- **21-23 kwietnia 2018** – Rzeczywistość, natura ludzka i społeczeństwo.
- **22-24 września 2018** – Antropologia postawy neurocytowej i teoria self.
- **24-26 października 2018** – Styl terapeuty, integracja nowej wiedzy i doświadczenia.

Spotkania obejmują dwa całe dni w sobotę i niedzielę (9:00-19:00) oraz poniedziałek (9:00-15:00), z przerwą na obiad i krótkimi przerwami kawowymi.

Po ukończeniu czterech części uczestnicy otrzymują certyfikat (śr. 84 godziny).

Koszt udziału w programie: 5000PLN
Wpisowe: 600PLN (25% zniki osób, które wpłacą do końca roku 2017) oraz 4 raty po 1100PLN płatne przed każdą kolejną częścią warsztatów. W ramach opłaty zapewniamy kanapki, herbatę i kawę.

W cenie programu wliczone są też materiały szkoleniowe w języku polskim oraz egzemplarz angielskiego wydania książki PHG.

Szczegółowe informacje i zapisy na szkolenie: biuro@gestalt-iteg.pl
Zapraszamy do zapoznania się z ofertą: www.gestalt-szkolenia.pl oraz http://gestalt-iteg.pl
Thinking about training to be a Gestalt Therapist?

The Welsh Psychotherapy Partnership is a small and friendly place to train!

- We offer small groups and a contemporary syllabus
- An Interim Counselling Award with the National Counselling Society, available at level 6
- And on completion of the course, the PG Diploma in Gestalt Psychotherapy with UKCP Registration

Our course taster days will be held on February 10th and June 2nd, 2018, with a further date in September to be confirmed.

Please note, we will be asking people to submit their application forms ahead of attending the taster day, and there will be a nominal charge of £25 for the day and the processing of the application.

If you then are accepted for training with us, and choose to take up your place, the hours accrued can be counted in your training log.

Full details are on our website: www.welshpsychotherapy.org.uk. Please get in touch for further information and to book a place on the taster day.
PGI Pacific Gestalt Institute is pleased to support the New Gestalt Voices project. We encourage new writers to raise your voices!

Co-founders Gary Yontef & Lynne Jacobs

PGI offers post-graduate, advanced clinical training to licensed psychotherapists, registered interns, or graduate students enrolled in a program that leads to licensed psychotherapy practice. Organizational consultants are also welcome. Instruction is offered by a faculty of certified gestalt therapists with considerable experience in training, teaching, and supervising beginning through advanced level therapists.

Pacific Gestalt Institute, Los Angeles, USA
www.gestalttherapy.org
COUPLES WORK - COURSE  
Starts February 2, 2018 | Kingston, Surrey

Certificate/diploma programme for practitioners wishing to extend their work into or with couples, using relational principles. The course includes a combination of theoretical frameworks, experiential learning and relevant skills, as well as working with embodied process and experimental interventions.

THE WELL GROUNDED THERAPIST - TASTER DAY 
April 7, 2018 | Central Oxford

As therapists we tend to pay attention to challenging aspects of the field. This taster day offers an alternative focus: to attend to the ground and so support our presence to the difficult and often negative figures of our working environment. Designed to impart a flavour of the residential retreat, below, but each may be enjoyed independently.

THE WELL GROUNDED THERAPIST - RESIDENTIAL 
May 31 - June 3, 2018 | Kings Caple, Herefordshire

In the peaceful setting of the Wye Valley, we explore inner and outer landscapes to restore, nourish and deepen connections with ourselves, others, and the wider environment. This extended weekend retreat is created through story-telling, ritual, spaces for process, reflection, and movement, and is supported by the use of creative writing or materials.

CONTEMPORARY TRAUMA PRACTICE - COURSE  
Starts September 14, 2018 | Ely, Cambridgeshire

Certificate/diploma programme to build your confidence, skills and understanding in working with trauma. This course offers a safe, non-pathologising and accessible approach, providing a combination of relational, embodied and experiential perspectives on trauma, including pragmatic ideas on psycho-education and experimental interventions.

THE SPACE BETWEEN - RESIDENTIAL 
October 1 - 5, 2018 | Charney Manor, Oxfordshire

An opportunity to join a community of practitioners interested in deepening their work with trauma. We will feel our way into a reflective space in which the experience of trauma can be held with curiosity, compassion and contact, opening the potential for choice. Bringing together elements of theory, skills development and personal process, we'll build a ground of support for growth and transformation.

See website for details and join our mailing list to receive news and updates on all events, workshops, and courses!

www.relationalthange.org
Many thanks for reading this second issue of *New Gestalt Voices*!

All feedback is very welcome and suggestions for improvement are gratefully received. Please email your comments to john@newgestaltvoices.org

This gestalt is complete. A new cycle begins. The third edition of the journal will be published in July 2018. You’ll find details of the different ways in which you might contribute on our website. While there, please sign up to our mailing list to receive news and updates.

www.newgestaltvoices.org