

# Gestalt Therapy and Gestalt Psychology

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## GESTALT-ANTECEDENT INFLUENCE OR HISTORICAL ACCIDENT

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There has been relatively little appraisal of the antecedent influence of Gestalt psychology on Gestalt therapy. This paper attempts to expand on the work of previous academic writers on the theoretical precursors of Gestalt therapy. Most of the relevant articles, monographs, or books which mention Gestalt psychology still refer to Wallen (1957), whilst Perls in his books referred to the influence of Gestalt psychology, but gave little indication of the extent of that influence. Yontef (1979, p.27) highlighted the need for this type of exploration:

Neither Gestalt psychology nor the connection with Gestalt therapy is adequately understood, even by most Gestalt therapists, and has not been adequately discussed in the Gestalt therapy literature. Unfortunately this very important subject must be reserved for a more technical paper (see Perls, 1973).

The aim of this paper is to discuss the areas of commonality between Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology.

### *Two Gestalt Psychologists' Attitudes*

Henle (1978) in an article titled "The relations between Gestalt psychology and Gestalt therapy" was critical of Perls' use of the word "Gestalt." She quotes a number of Perls' statements out of context, or slants meanings in favor of her particular argument. The final conclusion that she drew was that ". . . the two approaches have nothing in common" (Henle, 1978, p.23).

One Gestalt psychologist apart from Henle who has mentioned the relationship between the two approaches was Arnheim (1974). The one paragraph letter to *Contemporary Psychology* was not sufficient to allow analysis of his position other than the consideration of Arnheim's own interpretation of what Wertheimer would have done -- that is, ". . . fly into one of his magnificent rages at the use of the name 'Gestalt' in Gestalt therapy"

(Arnheim, 1974, p.22). This letter did, however, prompt Henle's article (1978).

Only by critical analysis of certain quotations and extracts from early writings in the Gestalt literature can a meaningful conclusion be drawn as to the degree to which Perls adopted, developed and integrated certain notions and concepts from Gestalt psychology.

### *Perls' Use of Gestalt*

The very fact that Perls called his method of therapy "Gestalt therapy" indicated that he saw significant links and connections between that therapy and the tradition of Gestalt psychology. Perls regarded Gestalt therapy with its "dependence on the laws of Gestalt dynamics" as "the next step after Freud in the history of psychiatry" (Perls, 1969b, p. 34). Simkin reported Perls as saying of Gestalt psychology:

. . . the thing that fascinated me was the Gestalt approach. For the first time, the breaking away from the piecemeal consideration and getting perspective.  
(Quoted in Ruitenbeck, 1972, p. 117)

Gestalt therapists themselves appear not to be in agreement as to the theoretical precursors of Gestalt therapy, and particularly to Gestalt psychology. For instance, Enright (1975a) argued that Gestalt psychology was probably the least important theoretical influence on Perls, but was possibly used to name the new therapy because it was the most recent influence, and ". . . was uppermost in his (Perls') mind" (Enright, 1975b, p. 127). Yontef (1979, p.27) is more positive when enunciating the influence of Gestalt psychology:

. . . the underlying holistic and phenomenological structure of Gestalt therapy is a clinical derivative of Gestalt psychology.

Perls (1969b, 1973) noted that although he was an assistant to Professor Kurt Goldstein and aware of the Gestalt psychologists' work in the 1920's, he was primarily psychoanalytically oriented, both as a therapist/analyst and as a patient. It is significant that Perls did not use the word "Gestalt" in any title nor in any significant manner when he wrote *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* (1947), his first major attempt to outline his theory. Rosenfeld (1978, p.13) commented on this point:

There's not a lot in *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* that points to the really extensive development that he made of the whole metaphor of Gestalt.

Perls chose the title "Gestalt therapy" (in the title of *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*) over strong objections from his wife Laura, and his coauthors Paul Goodman and Ralph Hefferline (1951). Laura Perls considered that the approach as outlined in the book had little relation to the academic Gestalt psychology she had studied, and wanted to use the name "Existential Therapy." Goodman thought the title too esoteric, while Hefferline wanted their work presented as "Integrative Therapy" (Shepard, 1976). It is perhaps not surprising that Enright (1975b) suggested that the name Gestalt therapy was an historical accident, and that it is misleading to attach too much weight to it in understanding Perls' works.

This "historical accident" theory is not upheld, however, by Perls' own work. In his autobiography (1969b), Perls described his relation to Gestalt psychologists as a peculiar one, but in no way denied that such a relationship existed. He acknowledged his adoption of the fundamental idea of the unfinished situation, or incomplete gestalt, to Gestalt therapy. He also stated his admiration for their work, although disagreeing with their logical positivism.

Perls' feelings about his status as a "Gestaltist" are revealed in this quotation:

The academic Gestaltists of course, never accepted me. I certainly was not a pure Gestaltist.  
(Perls, 1969b, p.62)

Perls' gratitude for the contributions made by classical Gestalt psychology to Gestalt therapy was reflected both in his dedication of his first book to the memory of Max Wertheimer, and in this poem which appeared in his autobiography:

Reality is nothing but  
The sum of all the awareness  
As you experience here and now  
The ultimate of science thus appears  
As Husserl's unit of phenomenon  
And Ehrenfeld's discovery:  
The irreducible phenomenon of all  
Awareness, the one he named  
And we still call  
GESTALT.  
(Perls, 1969b, p.30)

### *Holism, Smuts and Gestalt Psychology*

The basic premise on which Gestalt therapy rests is that of holism (Perls, 1973). The greatest value in the Gestalt approach, according to Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951, p.19):

. . . lies in the insight that the whole determines the parts, which contrasts with the previous assumption that the whole is merely the total sum of its elements.

Latner stated: "The foundation of the first principle of Gestalt therapy is holism" (1973, p.6). This basic premise was not only adopted by Gestalt psychology, but also by Gestalt therapy, and in fact all of the humanistic and existential psychologies (Back, 1973). Perls had largely credited the Gestalt psychologists with the formulation of the concept of holism and applied to his model of personality wrote that it was:

. . developed by a group of German psychologists working in the field of perception, who showed that man does not perceive things as unrelated isolates but organizes them in the perceptual process into meaningful wholes.  
(Perls, 1973, p.2)

It would appear that the term holism was most recently coined by Smuts in 1906 and alluded to by him as early as 1892-3, although this notion can be traced to Eastern philosophy and religions many centuries earlier.

Smuts formulated a number of basic concepts, the most important of which to Perls were the unity of the individual and integration. Smuts wrote:

. . every individual form of life is a unity . . . it is this ultimate and internal unity that shapes the innumerable products of life into an orderly and harmonious whole . . . This distinct, single, indivisible unity of life in each individual I call the personality of that individual . .

(Smuts, 1895, p.61)

This understanding of man regarded the physical, the emotional, thoughts, all mental events, and so on, as expressions of a unified being; of each individual. Holistically we cannot attain an adequate concept of self by merely summing up the individual component parts of self -- the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Gestalt therapy is a philosophy of life based on the holistic epistemology outlined above. It is descriptive, integrative, and structural, emphasizing phenomenology, the here and now as well as a positive wholeness which emphasizes our creating our lives and discovering our strengths.

### *The Organism-Environment Interaction*

Basically, Gestalt therapy is concerned with the interaction between the organism and its environment (Baumgardner, 1975). In the healthy organism, many needs are present at any one time. These organize themselves into a hierarchy of importance, as a natural process. The most dominant need forms, or becomes figure. In order to satisfy this need, the organism searches its environment for the desired object (sensory activity); when the object is found, the organism acts to assimilate it (motor activity). The concept of the connection between the sensoric and motor activities has been extensively discussed by the Gestalt psychologists for many years (for example, Koffka, 1935; Hartmann, 1935). When the needed object has been assimilated, the Gestalt is closed, and a state of equilibrium is reached. The formerly dominant need recedes from awareness (becomes ground), and the energy thus freed is directed towards the next most dominant need. Organisms are thus self-regulatory or homeostatic. (Smuts, 1926; Lewin, 1935; Goldstein, 1939; Latner, 1973; Perls, 1973). In this way, the organism is regarded as being "born with the capacity to cope with life" (Simkin, 1976, p.17).

### *Figure-Ground Differentiation/Pragnanz/Closure*

Perls (1969) had been influenced by Wertheimer, Koffka and Kohler through their writings (although his wife Laura graduated in Gestalt psychology in 1926 from Frankfurt University). He had direct contact with Lewin and with Goldstein, working with the latter at the Goldstein Institute for Brain Damaged Soldiers in 1926. Goldstein expanded Gestalt psychology as a study of perception to Gestalt psychology as a study of the whole person (based largely on Koffka's work (1935)). His views appeared in *The Organism* (Goldstein, 1939), and came to be known as "organismic theory."

Goldstein argued that the primary organization of organismic functioning is the figure-ground. He proposed three dynamic concepts -- i) the equalization processes or tension) reduction systems that keep the organism centered or balanced; ii) the processes of "getting what one wants in the world" (a concept adapted by Perls extensively in psychotherapy); and iii) "the notion of self-actualization. In this theory, self-actualization is the "master motive." The satisfaction of any specific need becomes figure when it is the dominant need at that time for the whole organism. This notion was also incorporated almost verbatim from Goldstein (e.g., " Perls, 1969a). Perls (1969b) wrote that whilst working for Goldstein, he had not understood the term self-actualization, although twenty five years

later, coming from Maslow it acquired more meaning. It was not until much later that the concept was fully understood and acquired.

Perls (1973, p. 3) stated that the first basic premise of Gestalt therapy is that

. . . it is the organization of facts or perceptions and not the individual items of which they are composed, that defines them and gives them their specific and particular meaning.

Wheeler (1932) had recorded this notion as the first of his eight "organismic" laws, which hold that any item of reality is in its own right an integrated whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Fantz (1975) argued that academic Gestalt psychologists did not fully apply the principles of Gestalt formation (similarity, symmetry, pragnanz) to organic perceptions--e.g., feelings, emotions or body awareness, " . . . nor did they integrate the problems of motivation with those of perception" (Fantz, 1975, p. 81). Fantz claimed that this integration was successfully introduced by Perls. It may be, however, that Fantz had overlooked the work of Goldstein and other Gestalt psychologists, which shows how the figure-ground and other principles can be applied to the total motivation and action processes of individuals, and how physical and mental pathologies may be viewed in terms of these principles. It is significant that Goldstein subtitled his book *A Holistic Approach to Biology: Derived From Pathological Data in Man*. In fact, Perls appears to be simply the first to apply such principles, and especially that of the figure-ground, to psychotherapy.

This figure-ground concept was quickly assimilated into the main body of Gestalt therapy and today it is almost synonymous with Gestalt. The figure-ground principle stated that every perception is organized into a figure which stands out from a background. However, these are not necessarily properties of the stimulus object, but rather of the psychological field. Koffka (1935) devoted five chapters to the environmental field, and to figure-ground differentiation. Although Koffka did attempt to incorporate memory, will, and action, and referred to the "silent organization" of human experience, figure remained limited essentially to inside-the-form visual phenomena, and ground to outside-the-form phenomena.

Perls et al. (1951), introduced the concept of needs into the "psycho-therapeutic" figure-ground concept (i.e., needs arise and the Gestalt recedes when the need is satisfied). Koffka, however, referred to a super sensory ground, from which all sensory figures arise, and to which all figures return once needs have been satisfied. It can be argued that in Gestalt psychology as in Gestalt therapy, Gestalt formation is considered a primary characteristic of organismic functioning.

Perls (1973, p. 9) discussed the connection between needs and figure-ground differentiation:

Formulating this principle in terms of Gestalt psychology, we can say that the dominant need . . . becomes the foreground, and the other needs recede. . . into the background.

A field that is poorly organized is still organized to the individual. The Gestalt psychologists' principle of pragnanz suggests that any psychological field is as well organized as conditions permit at that time. Thus it is possible, as was recognized by Koffka and Kohler years ago, that certain circumstances can interfere with the Gestalt formation process (e.g., stress, motivation). This concept was adopted by Perls, who went on to argue that in neurotic self-regulation, certain forces are prevented from having their full effect on the individual. Thus, the meeting or contact between the self and the environment may be less than optimal, resulting in a distorted perception of the

contact process. Kohler (1947, p. 169) stated: "To a degree, the organization of the field may yield to stress . . .," where stress referred to the particular valence associated with the parts of the field. This position was endorsed by Perls (1947).

The impression that the Gestalt principle of figure-ground is merely the equivalent of "attention" in other systems is not implied here. The Gestalt psychologists emphasized figure-ground as a spontaneous and natural organization which does not depend on learning, but is an inevitable consequence of man's perceptual apparatus.

Perls et al. (1951), criticized the Gestalt psychologists for not having sufficient interest in the meaning of "ground." To Perls, ground is everything that is progressively eliminated from attention in the experienced situation. This criticism may be seen as an overstatement, for it is contrary to the principle of "what is, is" (implying acceptance of the self), (Perls, 1973); it is also contrary to the anti-analytic position generally espoused by Gestalt therapists and Gestalt psychologists. The later introduction of the concept of grooving shows how Perls' attitude to this concept changed (Baumgardner, 1975). Both the Gestalt psychologists and Perls adopt the position that the figure is more impressive, it dominates consciousness and is usually mentioned before the ground.

One of the important laws in Gestalt psychology was that of closure (Koffka, 1935). Once characteristic of perceptions is the individual's movement towards closure. Closure for Perls was achieved by concentrating on the now, by rejecting intellectualization and flights into the past or future, and by accepting responsibility for ourselves (Ronan, 1977). Polster and Polster (1974) suggested that closure was more than a perceptual reflex. Rather, it is a personal reflex which is frequently thwarted by societal restraints and thus interrupts some processes which are forced into the background where they remain as "unfinished business." Perls stated the place of "closure" in Gestalt therapy:

. . . one of the basic laws of Gestalt formation -- the tension arising out of the need for closure is called frustration, the closure is called satisfaction . . . With satisfaction, the imbalance is annihilated, it disappears. The incident is closed.

Just as balance and discovery are met on all levels of existence, so are frustration, satisfaction and closure.  
(Perls, 1969b, pp.86-87)

Once closure has allowed the dominant need to recede from awareness, the individual returns to a state of equilibrium.

### *The Concept of Equilibrium*

Many of the broad philosophical features of the Gestalt psychologists' work, such as the laws of pragnanz and closure, are related to a fundamental concept which runs through the whole of Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology -- that of equilibrium. The perceptual field and its underlying isomorphic cortical field are said to be dynamic wholes, which, like a magnetic field of force in physics, tends towards equilibrium. When the psychological field is disturbed by the introduction of new forces, the whole undergoes a new alignment of forces until equilibrium is once more established. In short, it is a fundamental property of percepts to tend towards stability, and to remain as stable as conditions permit. Perls stated:

Man seems to be born with a sense of social and psychological balance as acute as the sense of physical balance . . . difficulties spring not from the desire to reject such equilibrium, but from misguided movements aimed towards finding and maintaining it. (Perls, 1973, p.27)

### *The Role of Attention, Awareness and Experience*

Attention is important in Gestalt therapy because the therapist usually endeavors to facilitate the individual towards attending to cortical processes or phenomena. Ternus (1926, p.156) stated that attention

. . . embraces the entire figure unless instructions to the contrary are given . . . and the center of attention typically coincides with the figural center of the presented object.

Attention for Perls is a deliberate way of listening or attending to the foreground, (1969a). Fantz (1975) regarded perception as a function of the figure-ground relationship and a direct result of the focus of attention and activity is called the figure or Gestalt, and what does not become part of the focus remains background (Latner, 1973). Perls would probably have concurred with Henle (1961, p.163) when she stated that ". . . attention intensifies the process which underlies the perception of an object."

The role of awareness in Gestalt therapy is somewhat obscure, although it is of fundamental importance. Polster and Polster (1974) described awareness or experience as one of the three touchstones of all Gestalt therapy, the other two being contact and experiment. Enright described awareness in the following manner:

. . . awareness is a state of consciousness that develops spontaneously when organismic attention becomes focused on some particular region of the organism-environment contact boundary at which an especially important and complex transaction is occurring.

Enright, 1970, p. 108)

A technique of Gestalt therapy is the development of the continuum of awareness -- the therapist facilitating a person increasing awareness in himself/herself. Most people interrupt or block awareness if it is unpleasant, and avoid it, developing defense mechanisms such as intellectualization or flights into the past or future, anxiety, denial, deflection or other "coping" strategies. Kreuger (1928) had foreshadowed such techniques when reflecting that an emotional state tended to be dissipated by attention to it as such. When attention and awareness come together -- the "fuzzy twin" -- there is an experience of the "now" (Baumgardner, 1975).

The greater the experience of the now, the more choices become available to the person. And, although it is not apparently mentioned elsewhere, Baumgardner (1975) credited Perls with saying that the greater the awareness, the greater the chance of tracing -- otherwise called a "grooving" process. This means that there is an after-image that links up the past and the acquisition of experience.

This concept is firmly rooted in Gestalt psychology. Gottschaldt (1926) wrote that past experience is an explanatory concept in that such experience constitutes an independent force, capable of

modifying subsequent perception in a specific manner. Baumgardner (1975) concurred to a large degree -- the grooving always provides one part of the Gestalt -- the background.

### *The Here and Now*

Perls (1966, p. 14) set out an equation of "now = experience = awareness = reality." The only awareness is here and now, whether it be the past (memories) or the future (anticipation) -- past and future events are in the present, as they occupy present processes. Naranjo (1970, p.66) contended that Gestalt therapy " . . . aims at the sub-ordination of these thought forms to life."

Perls insisted that to stray from the present distracts from the living quality of reality (Perls, 1969a). This emphasis on the "now" is consistent with the Gestalt psychologists' definition of psychology as the study of the immediate experience of the whole organism, the "now" as it is perceived (Marx and Hillix, 1973). Asch (1970, p. 170) in writing a brief outline of Gestalt psychology suggested that it " . . . assigns a place of crucial importance in psychological enquiry to the data of immediate experience."

Murphy and Jensen set out the Gestalt psychologists' position with regard to personality and present immediate experience, a position endorsed by Perls:

Just as the parts fail to explain the whole, so the past fails to explain the present or the present the future . . . at the present instant the future seems simply non-existent . . .  
(Murphy and Jensen, 1932, p.24)

### *The Concept of Boundaries and Neuroses*

Hartmann (1935) referred to the work of Rubin who discussed the role of contours and boundaries Koffka, 1935) between figure and ground. Koffka went further and distinguished between the self and others. Kohler (1922, 1947) referred to the process whereby the environment meets the self (or the individual). Every part of the organism is said to be constantly influenced both by the outside world and by other parts within. Kubler's concept of boundaries suggested:

. . . the inner states of any finite system develop relative to more or less fixed conditions along its boundaries and its interior.  
Kohler, 1922, p.61)

These then are boundary problems, the state of any region of the system at any particular time is also influenced -- even determined by the state of every other region. This principle constitutes the fundamental thought underlying the theory of Gestalten. Gestalt therapy practically reiterates this principle when it states that neuroses occur at the boundary.

Perls has incorporated this concept and amplified it in most of his books (Perls et al., 1951; Perls, 1969b, 1973):

The study of the way in which a person functions in his environment is the study of what goes on at the contact boundary between the individual and his environment. It is at this contact boundary that the psychological events take place. Our thoughts, our actions, our behavior, and our emotions are our way of experiencing and meeting those



boundary events.  
(Perls, 1973, p.17)

In fact, Perls did not make a clear distinction between the contact boundary and the ego boundary, which is the differentiation between the self and otherness. However, this concept of Koffka's has been largely incorporated, as shown by Perls' description of the identification and alienation functions of the ego-boundary. Inside the ego boundary there is a cohesion, love and cooperation, whilst outside the ego boundary is suspicion and strangeness (Perls, 1969b).

Gestalt therapy regarded neuroses as disturbances of the contact boundary:

All neurotic disturbances arise from the individual's inability to find and maintain a proper balance between himself and the rest of the world . . .  
(Perls, 1973, p.31)

In the healthy individual, the process of Gestalt formation and recession flows smoothly. If Gestalten are not adequately fulfilled, blocked energy thus results in anxiety. Perls (1973) interpreted Goldstein's view of anxiety as implying that anxiety is the result of "catastrophic expectations." This can lead to detachment and isolation of organismic parts, or in other words, a "splitting" of the personality. Baumgardner (1975) suggested that anxiety indicates that the individual has left the present for an imaginary journey into fantasy or the future. Anxiety is regarded as a substitute emotion which blocks awareness of what is really going on inside the individual. This is the view of Baumgardner (1975) and other Gestalt therapists who have reiterated Goldstein's (1939) description of the manner in which neurosis can result from anxiety.

### *The Mind-Body Position*

Perls adopted the "holistic doctrine," which stated that man is a unified organism -- a fact Perls suggested was ignored by psychiatry and psychotherapy, which ". . . are still operating in terms of the old mind-body split" (Perls, 1973, p.9). However, we only need to refer back to Wertheimer, who, discussing the mind-body split stated: "The principle here, is that something mental is meaningfully coupled with something physical" (Wertheimer, 1925, p.8). Thus, to observe the physical is to infer the mental. It was further expanded by Wertheimer, who carefully explained how often it is that various physical processes are "Gestalt identical" with the mental processes.

Gestalt psychologists formulated the law of "psychophysical isomorphism" which began from the prima facie dualism of mind and body. This notion further expands:

. . . that molar events in experience are structurally identical to the corresponding molar physiological events in the brain.  
(Henle, 1978, p.25)

This is, in fact, a dualist position. Perls' position on the body-mind debate is not entirely clear. A monist position is espoused in some places when he maintained that we do not have a body but rather: "We are a body, we are somebody" (Perls, 1969a, p.6). *In Ego, Hunger and Aggression*, he suggested that ". . . body and soul are identical 'in re' though not 'in verbo,' the words 'body' and 'soul' denoted two aspects of the same thing" (Perls, 1947, p.33). Further elaborations of Perls (1947) suggest that dualistic and parallelistic theories are based on an artificial split which has no existence in reality. Although Perls considered himself a monist, a number of extracts from his writings

suggest that he was not entirely a monist, but rather an uncertain dualist because he referred (1947, p.110) to " . . . purely mental experiences which comprise " . . . wishes, phantasies and daydreams . . ."; hardly the words of a pure monist. On the whole, it would appear as though he adopted a double aspect theory.

The position as espoused by Perls was not dissimilar to that of Wertheimer (1925) who stated that when a man is timid, afraid or energetic, happy or sad, it can be shown often that the course of his physical process is "Gestalt identical" with the course pursued by the mental process. Perhaps such statements influenced Perls when he introduced " . . . the concept of the unified field" which stated that in psychotherapy, what a person does gives the therapist clues as to what (s)he thinks (Perls, 1973, p. 12). Gobar (1968) in referring to psychotherapy, stated that . . . the concept of "psychological equilibrium" is analogous to the concepts of 'physical equilibrium' and 'physiological equilibrium.'" If Gobar is adopting the word "analogous" in the same way that the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* (1973) explains its meaning, that is, "equality of ratios" or equivalency" then the respective positions of Gestalt psychologists' usage and that of Perls may be seen as somewhat confused.

Henle stated in her book *Documents of Gestalt Psychology* (1961) that Gestalt psychologists hold that expressive behavior reveals its meaning directly in personality. The approach according to Henle, and one adopted by Perls, (1947, 1969a) was based on the "principle of isomorphism" (Henle, 1961, p. 308), whereby processes in one medium are similar in their structural identity to those in a different medium. Applied to body and mind, this meant that:

. . . if the forces which determine bodily behavior are structurally similar to those which characterize the corresponding mental states, it may become understandable why physical meaning can be read off directly from a person's appearance and conduct.  
(Henle, 1961, p.308)

Another direct quote from Henle is compatible with the views expressed by Perls in most of his works:

The way a person dresses, keeps his room, handles the language . . . can be called expressive in that they permit conclusions about the personality or the temporary state of mind of the individual.  
(Henle, 1961, p.302)

Kohler insisted strenuously on a "special type of parallelism" when he wrote:

When someone experiences that flash by which a new idea or the solution of a problem comes to him, he will suddenly interrupt his walking or abruptly strike his head. Here both his inner experience and his outer aspect will exhibit the same interruption of continuity.  
(Kohler, 1929, p. 249, quoted by Hartmann, 1935, p. 48)

Henle's criticisms are somewhat diluted when considering one section of Hartmann's book *Gestalt Psychology*, published in 1935. Hartmann stated that: " . . . the monism of Gestalt is implied" when it is asserted that the psychological and the physical are " . . . one and the same reality (and) are expressed in two different conceptual systems" (Hartmann, 1935, p.71). (It is a Zen notion that mind and body are not one, not two, but between one and two). Further, Gestalt psychology equated

bodily with mental events since the same configuration is found in both. It is this concept which appears to be one of the most important in Gestalt therapy. The therapist can only ever be in touch with a client from various extrapolations and "interpretation" of physical processes from mental material. The total organism is not to be analyzed into parts. Perls stated that:

We believe further that the "mental-physical" or "mind-body" split is a totally artificial one, and that to concentrate on either term in the dichotomy is to preserve neurosis, not to cure it. . .

(Perls, 1973, p.53)

This line of thought represents another direct influence of Goldstein on Perls. Goldstein suggested that loss of categorical thinking (inability to abstract and classify) results in a limitation of orientation and of action. In all his writings, Perls emphasized the importance of using words which express the precise meaning of what he wanted to convey. Pathology, he stated (Perls, 1947) produces both distortion of word meaning (incorrect vocabulary) and wrong application of grammar (incorrect syntax). He (Perls) encouraged one to learn the value of each word, and to appreciate the power hidden in the "logos." Avoidance of ego language (use of "I" when speaking of oneself) and the avoidance of personal responsibility are closely related.

### *Psychotherapy and Integration*

Gobar (1968) is one of the few authors to have discussed the role and purpose of psychotherapy in Gestalt psychology. He suggests that in Gestalt theory, all psychological disorders involve, in some form or other, the destruction of a basic psychological structure and a concomitant generation of a "bad configuration." This results in a pervasive disturbance of the equilibrium of the psychological makeup as a whole.

It is important to examine the rationale for therapist assistance/intervention with clients. Perls (1973) suggested that successful therapy " . . . frees the patient's ability to abstract and integrate . . . his/her abstractions" (p. 103). The long term goal of therapy:

. . . must be to give him the means with which he can solve his present problems and any that may arise tomorrow or next year.

(Perls, 1973, p.63)

If successful therapy integrates the personality (Perls, 1973), then the approach described by Gobar (1968) has much in common with that of Perls. According to Gobar, the concept of "cure" in psychotherapy (cure comes from the Latin *cura* meaning care) can be seen as:

. . . the process of the reconstruction of the psychological system and the resultant restoration of equilibrium."

(Gobar, 1968, p.128)

For Gobar, the principle of equilibrium holds for all psychological processes including the perceptual and cognitive at all genetic levels. In addition, it also " . . . constitutes the explanatory principle for the fundamental process of adaptation of the organism-environment" (Gobar, 1968,p.147).

Goldstein is quoted as describing the process of integration in this way:

All of a person's capacities are always in action in each of his activities. The capacity that is particularly important for the task is in the foreground; the others are in the background. All of these capacities are organized in a way which facilitates the self-realization of the total organism in the particular situation. For each performance there is a definite figure-ground organization of capacities . . .

(In Polster and Polster, 1974, p.66)

One of the therapeutic tools that Perls (1969a, 1973) adopts when a person cannot remember a dream is to request the person to fantasize what the dream would be if (s)he could remember it -- a method which some regard as free association (Perls et al., 1951). Hartmann (1935, p.65) stated that: "Wertheimer actually won some repute as an authority on the diagnostic or detective use of the free association method." Once again, the influence of Gestalt psychology appears to have been present.

Perls adopts a position on awareness similar to that espoused by various writers on Gestalt psychology such as Hartmann (1935). One of Perls' statements which has been popular in the literature gives us a clear insight into the nature of cure in psychotherapy: ". . . awareness per se -- of and by itself -- can be curative (cited in Baumgardner, 1975, p.25). Hartmann writes that ". . . an emotional state tends to be dissipated by attention to it as such" (Hartmann, 1935, p.83). Kreuger also added to this concept of cure when stating:

An emotional complex loses in its Intensity and plasticity of its emotional character to the degree that it becomes analyzed, so that its parts become relatively separated, or that the partial moments in it come out clearly as such.

(Kreuger, 1928, p.62)

Once again, the writings of early Gestalt psychologists appear similar to those of Perls.

### *Conclusions*

This paper has indicated a number of areas where the depth and extent of the influence of Gestalt psychology on Gestalt therapy appears evident. Gestalt psychology has influenced not only the theoretical foundations of Gestalt therapy, but also the realm of philosophical and practical applications of Gestalt therapy.

Gestalt therapy depended a great deal on Gestalt psychology. The arguments of Arnheim, and more recently Henle, that there is no relationship between Gestalt psychology and Gestalt therapy are thus misleading.

I conclude that although Perls was remiss in acknowledging theoretical precursors, his work was certainly influenced by a number of sources, but particularly by Gestalt psychology.

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