Intersubjectivity: I am always embedded in my experience

As we have seen in the last point, you have your subjective experience of the world and I have my subjective experience of the world. The world may be made up of a multitude of subjective selves each making sense of their own experience and this may suggest that individuals walk the earth as separate atomized individuals disconnected from one another. However, anyone who has ever felt tearful in response to another’s grief, angry at another’s injustice or whose heart has raced with another’s excitement will have an embodied sense that this is not so. We discover who we are in relationship by dialoguing with our respective fields of experience.

When we talk about phenomenology in gestalt therapy there is a danger that we place our focus solely on the client, observing and working with their awareness continuum without due consideration to what is happening between client and therapist. Whilst we work in the service of the client, our subjective reactions in the meeting provide us with information. Of course, we do need to ensure that we are not responding to our own proactive material and this is why we need regular supervision coupled with our own personal therapy. In gestalt therapy ‘clinical phenomenology is a two-person practice’ (Yontef, 2002: 19), through dialogue we explore the phenomenology of the relationship. I have my experience of the meeting and you have yours, I explore with you what meaning we create and how it is created.

It is the intersubjective relational patterns that emerge between client and therapist, with attention to the minutiae of these patterns in the here and now, together with how these patterns repeat in the client’s wider field of relationships that are of interest to the gestalt therapist. By its very nature gestalt’s views on self as process constitute human beings as intersubjective beings. That we live and breathe in an intersubjective field of relations becomes more obvious to us the more often we meet with difference. If I meet with someone from a radically different culture, my different

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As I write I am aware of one thing that has surfaced in relation to me over the years. Some stand intersubjective meetings changing those clients changed the experience of those meetings remembering do too as the from the interactions I had in the field of my work as the interactions within the in experience can be understood (Jacobs 1992: 27, original; my client’s can only be of these relationships or these relationships now.

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Your subjective experience of the world, if subjective selves each had ever felt excitement will have an iscover who we are in fields of experience. gestalt therapy there is n the client, observing um without due con- cient and therapist. our subjective reactions on. Of course, we do go to our own proactive pervision coupled with pp 'clinical phenomen-. :02: 19), through dia- he relationship. I have e yours, I explore with created.

As that emerge between minutiae of these pat- w these patterns repeat a are of interest to the 's views on self as projective beings. That we f of relations becomes xit with difference. If l n culture, my different world-view is brought more sharply into focus, as is the way we then make sense of our respective worlds in the meeting.

The human organism/environment is, of course, not only physical but social. So in any humane study . . . we must speak of a field in which at least social-cultural, animal and physical factors interact.

(PHG, 1951: 228)

PHG go on to say that when we encounter novelty, such as when I meet you and you meet me, the novelty needs to be assimilated. This process of assimilation leads to 'creative adjustment of the organism and the environment' (PHG, 1951: 230, original italics). When we meet we are both changed in that meeting; the change might be a hardening or softening of the contact boundary. From a gestalt perspective on-going change between subjectivities is inevitable because of our view that reality, meaning and experience are co-created in the between of the relationship.

As I write I am aware of a feeling of gratitude and humility surfacing in relation to many of the clients I have worked with over the years. Some stand out more than others but all these intersubjective meetings changed me in some way just as my meeting those clients changed them. I also change as I remember the experience of those meetings and I imagine that the people I am remembering do too as they look back. These experiences emerge from the interactions I have enjoyed within the intersubjective field of my work as a therapist. 'Experiencing emerges out of interactions within the intersubjective field, and behavior and experience can be understood only in the context of that field' (Jacobs 1992: 27, original italics). Hence, my experience and that of my client's can only be understood within the context of each of these relationships or within the context of my remembering these relationships now.

The notion of self as relational and interdependent with others is supported in physics. Quantum theory shows we can never end up with separate things; you always deal with interconnections. As well as the gestalt saying that one thing leads to another, it is also true that one thing affects another.