

Frederick S. PERLS

edited by Jean-Marie ROBINE
and Charles BOWMAN

**PSYCHOPATHOLOGY
OF AWARENESS**

An unfinished and unpublished manuscript
with commentaries by contemporary gestalt-therapists:

**Robert Resnick, Michael V. Miller, Peter Philippson,
Jack Aylward, Bernd Bocian, Nancy Amendt-Lyon,
Peter Cole, Myriam Muñoz Polit, Rezeda Popova,
Charles Bowman, Jean-Marie Robine**

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Portrait of E.S. Perls

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FOREWORD

JEAN-MARIE ROBINE & CHARLES BOWMAN (EDS.)

Certainly, there had always been the rumor of the existence of an unfinished manuscript penned by Fritz Perls. For some of us, this rumor was a little more specific since this text even had a title: “*Psychopathology of Awareness*.” Charlie Bowman acquired Perls’ manuscript, which lay buried in a closet for many years. It took several more years before Charlie discovered a means of making it public. That means has become this book.

As early as the 1980s, Jean-Marie Robine had heard about it in a few conversations with some Gestalt Therapy pioneers, but none knew where to find it ... or claimed not to know. Like a “cold case” dear to television police series, discovery and investigation led to awakening the sleeping manuscript and shedding light on Perls’ last theoretical contributions.

More time was then necessary to overcome multiple hesitations and mobilize some authors to comment on this relatively brief and sometimes chaotic draft. Isn’t that always the case for unfinished texts? We therefore asked a few gestalt therapists, who occupy a place in the community among the authors who are advancing the theoretical and clinical development of gestalt therapy, or have been able in various ways to highlight the richness of Perls’ work, to resonate with this text that they were unfamiliar with and to comment on it in complete freedom.

In addition to Charlie Bowman from the US and Jean-Marie Robine from France, the creators and editors of this

book, the following authors have also contributed their words:

- Robert Resnick (US), a student of Perls was one of a handful Perls “graduated” by examination in 1969 at Esalen. He was awarded the 2019 APA, Division 29 Psychotherapy, Distinguished Award for the International Advancement of Psychotherapy;
- Michael V. Miller (US) who, in addition to his personal work, has remarkably prefaced, alone or with Isadore From, the main reprints of Perls’s works
- Peter Philippon (UK) who introduced the collated edition of all Perls articles and thus brought them out of the shadows
- Jack Aylward (US) who has made a name for himself internationally, among other things, through his writings not only clinical but also political and social
- Bernd Bocian (Italy/Germany), a major historian of the life and work of Perls. His book on the Berlin years of Perls is unanimously appreciated
- Nancy Amendt-Lyon (Austria) who recently offered us the edition of Laura Perls’ notebooks and unpublished documents, which she introduced masterfully
- Peter Cole (California, US) who recently co-wrote a book that explores relational group therapy from a Gestalt perspective and who regularly contributes to the literature of both gestalt therapy and group therapy
- Myriam Muñoz (Mexico City), who has contributed massively to the setting up of Gestalt therapy in Latin America, brings a resonance that is neither from the US nor from Europe, expanding the international gestalt therapy editorial scene; and,
- Rezeda Popova (Kazan, Russia), who will introduce us to a reading based on a different background from those who are familiar to English-speaking readers.

As each of us read and reflected independently upon Perls’ manuscript we were drawn to different ideas and possibilities, reminiscent of the ancient parable of the blind men and the elephant. In this parable, a group of blind men experience an elephant for the first time. None of them were aware of its shape and form so they examined it by touch. The first person felt the elephant’s trunk, proclaiming, “This being is like a thick snake.” The next person felt an ear, which seemed like

a kind of fan. Another felt a leg and proclaimed the animal was like a sturdy tree trunk. On and on they went, the last person feeling a tusk and announcing that the elephant was hard and smooth like a spear. A sage in the crowd shared with the blind men, “You are all right and you are all wrong! The elephant is all those things and more.”

This parable offers us insight into the relativism of each of our views and the need for different perspectives as we sharpen our focus on advancing gestalt therapy theory. We hope these eleven contributions, through their convergences and divergences, their choices and sometimes their criticisms, draw our attention to the neglected dimensions of some of the contributions of one of our founders; let’s say the major one. Through these offerings, we hope the reader will find once again the innovative character and creative stance of Fritz Perls, who has never ceased to amaze us.

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CHARLES BOWMAN

Charlie Bowman M.S., LCSW, LMFT, LCAC is an accomplished psychotherapist, educator, writer, and business consultant with extensive mental health, substance abuse and human resources experience. He has provided clinical services and supervision, corporate education and training, and business consulting for over 35 years. Today he enjoys his work as a gestalt trainer, writer, and practitioner in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA as well as training and consulting in the United States and abroad.

Charlie has over 30 publications in professional, business, and lay publications on a wide variety of topics, including gestalt therapy history, theory and practice, trauma and addictions counseling, business consulting and HR management, and providing book reviews of contemporary gestalt therapy publications. He has also presented to gestalt institutes, universities, and businesses worldwide. In addition to his work with Indiana and Purdue University early in his career, he is a senior faculty member at the Indianapolis Gestalt Institute, a guest lecturer/presenter at the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Los Angeles, and a member of the New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy. He is currently President of the Indianapolis Gestalt Institute and Past-President of the Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy.

Charlie has a Master of Science Degree in Clinical Psychology from Purdue University and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and a Licensed Clinical Addictions Counselor (LCAC). Charlie lives with his wife Ann in a quiet town in mid-America where he enjoys time with his five children, eight grandchildren, Rudy the dog and 15 chickens.

JEAN-MARIE ROBINE

Jean-Marie Robine is a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist since 1967 and gestalt-therapist since 1976. After more than 15 years as a psychologist, then director, in a public health service for children, adolescents and their families, he created in 1980 the French Institute for Gestalt Therapy (IFGT), the first Gestalt Institute created in France which, to date, has trained hundreds or maybe thousands of gestalt-therapists not only in France but also in Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, USA and Latin America.

He has been co-creator of the *Société Française de Gestalt*, then of *Collège Européen de Gestalt-thérapie*, and also co-creator of the *European Association for Gestalt Therapy*. Thus, he has been president of EAGT in the early nineties.

He created successively the 2 French Journals for Gestalt Therapy and had been their editor-in-chief during several years. Then he opened a non-profit organization for publishing a series of gestalt therapy books, l'Exprimerie, as a department of *Institut Français de Gestalt-thérapie*. Almost 50 Gestalt Therapy books, original or translations, have been published. He authored or edited 8 books, translated in several languages (French, English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian).

As organizer and coordinator of the international programs of IFGT, he now teaches mostly abroad some post-graduate programs or training for supervisors and trainers, but also enjoys his (partial) retirement in the countryside near Bordeaux, without chicken but with visiting fox, badgers, roe deers, boars and many birds...

COMMENTS

FRITZ PERLS

“NARCISSISTIC” BUFFOON OR IMPERFECT GENIUS?

THE REHABILITATION OF A BALANCED VIEW

ROBERT RESNICK

Preface

When editors Jean-Marie Robine and Charlie Bowman asked me to be part of this project commenting on Fritz Perls’s 1965 manuscript, *Psychopathology of Awareness* (hereinafter referenced as *PA*), which was to be the beginning of his new book, I was delighted and grateful. I asked them whether they wanted a more personal piece about Fritz at that time or a more theoretical commentary on this writing. They said they wanted both. I was pleased.

Frequently, people in training workshops ask me questions about having known and trained with Fritz and can’t get enough “Fritz stories.” In this chapter, I mix the two areas – the personal with the theoretical - and sometimes keep them separate. Frequently, each domain triggers something in the other domain. Everything is related.

Psychopathology of Awareness is really the only such work (albeit just an overview and beginning) since Perls, Hefferline and Goodman’s seminal 1951 *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1994) (hereinafter referred to as *PHG*). Yes, Perls did publish some later works after 1951 but they were more casual and “practical” volumes. These included *In and Out of The Garbage Pail* (Perls, 1969/1992) – a stream of consciousness, and *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim* (Perls, 1969/1988) – actual therapy sessions with commentary. Neither of these were primarily organized around

theory and theorizing. While many of the ideas Perls expresses in the few pages of this manuscript do not seem very new as we read them today in 2019, much of what he writes here was very new and controversial fifty-five years ago in 1965. This reality is one indication of the vast impact and a powerful testament to the influence Perls has had on both mainstream psychotherapy in general and, of course, Gestalt Therapy in particular over the last five decades. Hopefully, this will be acknowledged and appreciated.

First Reactions

Seeing and reading Fritz's typewritten manuscript, circa 1965 (which is about when I first met him), was both a breath of fresh air and flooded me with the warm breeziness of nostalgia. It was like being back there again. What a brilliant and lovable pain in the ass he was. I am profoundly grateful to have known Fritz, trained with Fritz, to have had Fritz both as a mentor and a friend. He was not easy, and he was wonderful.

I started reading *Psychopathology of Awareness*, and before I knew it there was a big smile on my face and a whole host of memories and feelings – bittersweet joy, sadness, irritation, and yes, even love. The “old school” typewriter font - some even with ink filled in letters - took me back to a time when Fritz was a visionary and I found a home. I was already attracted to Gestalt Therapy some months before by Jim Simkin (my other mentor) who introduced me to Fritz. Both of them not only “allowed” me to be me as a person (especially when working as a therapist), but “encouraged” me to be me (think: a kick in the ass). Jim used to say that if a person was significantly different (speech, manner, interests, demeanor, etc.) when they were a therapist from when they were a “regular” person, then at least one of them was full of shit. Of course, when doing therapy, clinical judgement and modulation was always central.

Fritz Perls was a complex and imperfect human being. He was brilliant, sensitive, nasty, abrupt, warm, angry, knowledgeable, seductive, self-centered, creative, suspicious, kind, exploitive, contemptuous, generous, cynical, idealistic, playful, selfish and sometimes beautiful. He was not a man who could be fully known by a few limited dimensions. He reminds me of New York City (and I'm a former New Yorker and taxi driver there): from the very best of everything to the worst of everything and just about everything in between – from the flop houses of the Bowery to the glitterati of the Metropolitan Opera and Carnegie Hall to Broadway and to pastoral Central Park.

At the very first coffee break of the first workshop at Esalen that I did with Fritz, I was standing around talking to someone and Fritz was leaving the room talking with someone else and accidentally knocked into me as he passed. Like a polite “good boy” I turned and said “Oh, excuse me.” Fritz stopped, slowly looked me up and down and then murmured “Vat for?” in a voice dripping

with pseudo contempt. I got it. He had bumped into me and *I was apologizing to him!* Later on that day, he quoted Nietzsche as saying that “*all laughter kills*” and I disagreed that this was *always* the case. We had a small “discussion” which remained unresolved. That night, both of us standing there naked at the railing of the Esalen baths overlooking the moonlit Pacific Ocean, he came over to me and we continued our conversation/argument. Finally, after his allowing for some exceptions to his unilateral Nietzsche pronouncement, I said I could agree with that. Then, with a smile on his face and a sparkle in his eyes, he said “Yes, but not before you argued.” Nailed again. To this day, standing naked overlooking the Pacific Ocean and arguing about Nietzsche is surrealistic. Today, I would laugh and call him out about his “gotcha” games.

I both appreciated (and was somewhat surprised) that Fritz dedicated his “opus” to Abe Maslow, Carl Rogers and all humanistic psychotherapists (*PA*, p. 13). Although he rarely praised contemporaries, he recognized that he was one in a long line of tradition, creativity, integration and distillation. Fritz, rarely portrayed as a team player and even more rarely showing any humility, shows in this writing that he affords both accolades and criticisms even to Freud, the “genius,” with whom he had a difficult (albeit long distance and very short personal) relationship. While not so good as a team player, he is a crucial member of a community of psychotherapy pioneers.

Here’s another Fritz story. I was having dinner at the Esalen Institute around 1965/1966 with Fritz, Virginia Satir and Rollo May and not quite believing I was at a table with three such luminaries. May and Satir were in the middle of a very serious and philosophical discussion while Fritz was just eating. I was watching and listening to everyone and trying to eat at the same time. Finally, Virginia Satir, a lovely and wonderful woman, turned to Fritz and said, “and what do you think, Dr. Perls?” Fritz, without missing a beat (or a bite), murmured in his heavily German accented English and in a clearly devaluing tone, “I don’t speak about such garbage.” No, he was not diplomatic, or even polite. Satir rebounded nicely and went on discussing the topic with May. It was clear that Fritz could be a genius and a sweet, wonderful guy and he could also be an asshole. He could have registered his opposition to such a cognitive emphasis in therapy and the larger culture in a more useful way.

When I brought my older son, Christopher, to the Esalen Institute in Big Sur I was very careful upon introducing him to Fritz. He was around 3 or 4 years old at the time and I didn’t know if Fritz would take to my son or ignore him. Fritz could go either way. They circled each other and ended up dancing together on the deck of the Esalen lodge. Somewhere, I have the photos. I knew then that Chris would be safe with Fritz.

At 82 years old now, I deeply resonate with Fritz’s comment that he was “getting on in years” and needed to get started with writing again if he wanted

to achieve his opus. This in 1965, when he was “only” 72 - almost a kid to me now. I fondly remember Erv Polster’s comment (at age 86 or 87 at the time) for the celebration of Phil Lichtenberg’s eightieth birthday at the AAGT conference in Philadelphia when he bellowed out “Oh, to be 80 again!” Erv is 97 now.

The problem for me, and maybe for Fritz and all of us, is that an “opus” is never done. The liveliness and vibrance of Gestalt Therapy are the ongoing distillations, integrations and new connections. I find it hard to accept that at any given point I, like everyone else, am a work in progress. Considering the alternative, I wouldn’t have it any other way. Writing this now, I’m wondering if this will motivate me to get on with writing what I want to write before I’m too late. I don’t like the picture of someone years from now looking at my notes and never finished-writings.

Fritz – The Man, The Theorist, The Clinician

Fritz Perls is frequently “sold short” as some sort of 1960s hippie “flash in the pan” narcissistic showman - hawking his wares to whatever audience he could muster. Some thought he “shot from the hip” when doing therapy (impulsive and casual), not recognizing that those hips had fifty years of training and doing therapy in their ground. He was (and frequently still is) confused with a whole range of outrageous “experiments” in Encounter and T-Groups. A popular narrative for some describes him as not as cultured, intellectual, smart or creative as either Laura Perls or Paul Goodman, co-developers of Gestalt Therapy. He is even sometimes portrayed at the boundary of a buffoon.

Sometimes, his later work at Esalen is dismissed as “California crazy” or hippy rebellion. This manuscript of 1965 is 15 years *after* *PHG* was published in 1951. Much of *PHG* was written by Perls while still in South Africa in the early 1940’s, some 20+ years before this writing. Fritz was driven to evolve his work and his theory as the world and he changed. No doubt until the day he died he was a work in progress, and any attempt to arrest Gestalt Therapy with a particular book or era as *the* benchmark will lead to its stultification and eventual demise. Fixed, disregarding context is never good.

A closer look shows a different story. Fritz was a treasure trove of ideas and a visionary – albeit rough, sometimes awkward, or even primitive – and frequently brilliant. However, the passage of time has demonstrated that Fritz was perhaps the biggest influence on mainstream psychotherapy since Freud. Arguably, along with Freud, Fritz was probably the most influential thinker effecting the whole array of psychotherapy models today: contemporary Psychoanalysis, CBT, Postmodern, Client Centered, EFT, and of course, Gestalt Therapy (some specific examples later in this chapter).

His theoretical musings (dismissed as outrageous, rebellious, and crazy to some) are the kindling for so many of today’s accepted ideas and integrated practices in mainstream psychotherapy – not only Gestalt Therapy but from

contemporary Psychoanalysis to contemporary CBT. His genius was in not being an ideologue locked into the walls of a creed or belief system but ruling nothing out and connecting and integrating what had previously been separate and fixed. “There is nothing new in Gestalt Therapy” was a favorite expression of his. The new is the creative organization and the relationships among the various domains.¹ Fritz, which is rare, was both able and willing to color outside of the lines of “what everybody knows and accepts.” He also was exquisitely fluid in learning inductively from the unfolding realities in front of him and then changing his thinking and theory. Reciprocally, his changed theoretical ideas would then affect what he did, how he observed, and what happened; exquisitely recursive. This ongoing dance of inductive and deductive theory building afforded a creative synchronicity that was a joy to behold and a gift to all of us.

Fritz was classically educated in Germany in the early part of the 20th century, progressing through gymnasium, university, and medical school followed by psychoanalytic training and analysis with Karen Horney, Wilhelm Reich, and others. He then worked with Kurt Goldstein who introduced him to holism and where he met Laura Perls (nee Lore Posner, who was already working in Goldstein’s lab). Despite his classical education he was not straightjacketed by the 19th century thinking at the time nor the separated and insulated bubbles of other disciplines that usually didn’t relate to each other. The German intellectual and social movements in the 1920s in Berlin and Frankfurt were similar in richness, scope, and depth to the 1940s in Paris. Perls’s thinking drew from holism, gestalt perceptual psychology, field theory, existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, linguistics, constructivism, theatre, Buber, Heidegger, Friedlander, Max Reinhardt, Goldstein, and later Smuts. In addition. He drew from new organizations, integrations, and distillations of all of these. No “new” elements, yet with novel organizations transformations happened. Any living organism is both *of* the field and interacting with the field - affecting the field and being effected by the field. In the beginning, when Fritz and Laura Perls began

1. Music can be a great example of how changing the organization and timing of the same notes, can create very different results. In the Broadway musical “Music Man” about a con man “musician” selling uniforms, instruments and lessons to kids in small towns where they can perform to the delight of their doting parents, there is a wonderful musical score. Among these is the beautiful love ballad “Goodnight My Someone” – a winsome, slow and yearning ballad. The lead song of the score, on the other hand, “Seventy-Six Trombones” is a typical brassy (even military) marching band song – complete with trombones and twirling drum majors – rousing, inspiring, jaunty, etc.

The reality is that the music (including both the notes and the sequence of the notes) for both of these songs *are exactly the same*. A “twofer” - two very different songs with the “same” melody – creating two very different moods/atmospheres in the listener. What’s different, is *how* they are organized in relation to each other – tempo, phrasing, staccato, sostenuto, volume, instrumentation, etc.

developing what was to become Gestalt Therapy in the mid-1920s, they were influenced by many people, traditions, philosophies, disciplines, and theories.

What *was* new was their novel organization and relationships among existing elements (again, Psychoanalysis, Gestalt Psychology, field theory, Goldstein's neuropsychiatry, existentialism, behaviorism, phenomenology, body, movement, dance, linguistics, systems and process, breathing, etc.) This organization, originally titled *Ego, Hunger and Aggression: A Revision of Freud's Theories* (Perls, 1994/1969a) was first called concentration therapy when written in South Africa in the 1930s and re named Gestalt Therapy when it was substantially revised first by Fritz Perls in the early 1940s in South Africa and revised again in deep collaboration with Paul Goodman in New York in the late-1940s and finally published in 1951 as *PHG* by Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman.

Over the next almost seven decades, Gestalt Therapists have traditionally organized the elements *within* Gestalt Therapy into various styles and emphases – depending upon who they were, their training, knowledge and background, their needs, etc. with a wide range of results – some creative and wonderful with others benign to very damaging. Different therapists, with differing depths of training in psychotherapy in general and Gestalt Therapy in particular, have crafted their idiosyncratic styles of Gestalt Therapy depending on what they made figural (e.g., field, relationship, dialogue, psychoanalytic ideas, body, breathing, existential issues, technique - two (or empty) chair work, process, catharsis and “unfinished business,” phenomenology, interpretation supporting people to change, frustrating, restoration of self-regulation, confrontation, intuitive and more and more). *Just as Fritz and Laura organized and integrated from the larger field what then constituted **their** Gestalt Therapy, individual Gestalt Therapists, from that point on, organize and integrate **their** Gestalt Therapy from that subset of the field - already identified as Gestalt Therapy by the Perls's.* Fritz and Laura stocked the kitchen with equipment, foods and condiments, ways to cook, etc. which allows the individual Gestalt Therapist to cook whatever he/she/they wishes, using the available equipment, tools and substances in that kitchen and also adding (with discrimination) new ideas, equipment, and processes. While there are lots of degrees of freedom for individualized organizations and integrations of Gestalt Therapy within the existential base, the field theoretical, phenomenological, and dialogic pillars, much more scrutiny and care must be taken with any paradigmatic shifts which may violate the existential foundation or the three pillars. A paradigmatic shift may be valid but not until serious consideration of changing the world view of Gestalt Therapy is fully explored.

Fritz's Influence on Mainstream Psychotherapy Today

For all his shortcomings, Fritz revolutionized psychotherapy with many of his seemingly “outrageous” cutting edge ideas from the 1930s through the 1960s –

all seen as heretic at the time. *Today, most, if not almost all of his then unorthodox ideas are integrated into contemporary psychotherapy* – with little recognition of Perls as the source. Here are some examples:

1. For psychoanalysts in the 1930s, exploring the individual psyche (“unresolved, unconscious conflicts”) or “reinforcement schedules” (for behaviorists) of a person, were how therapists of the day punctuated the part of the field they believed was relevant and essential to focus on and explore. This was the territory of psychotherapy. For Fritz, this was totally myopic. He saw people and all living things as contextual: co-created in interaction with their world. Field theory and the organismic/environmental field are needed to understand a human being and any living organism. Fritz Perls, the first “relational” therapist!

2. The particular type of “relational” therapy context for Fritz (from Martin Buber?) is the transparent (with modulated clinical judgement) meeting of, and the engagement with, the client by the therapist with both the therapist “showing up” (presence) and the therapist being impacted by the client (inclusion) - all without the therapist trying to control the outcome (commitment to dialogue). When the client knows how they impacted the therapist, they then know they have been received. When the client knows the therapist’s reaction to that impact, they then know that they have been met.

3. The centrality of the relationship between the client and the therapist regardless of modality, which research today shows is 30% of the variance of therapy outcome. This circa 1930s Perls’s heretical notion is a foundational part of most current models of therapy today, including contemporary psychoanalysis. This is far more than the “therapeutic alliance.”

4. The normalizing (depathologizing) of existential anxiety. Taking existential anxiety out of the pathological and accepting it as a very real part of being self-reflective and human.

5. Identifying fixed perceptual organizations or fixed perceptual gestalts, reframed by some today as Schema theory. These unaware fixed perceptual organizations constitute half of “character.” The other half are fixed and unaware behavioral responses. Here I also think of linguists Edward Sapir (mentor to Benjamin Whorf) and the Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis: “language is a mold into which infant minds are poured.”

6. The importance and honoring of the phenomenological organization and meaning making of the client is not to be colonized by the imposed phenomenological organization and meaning making of the therapist or theorist. (Interpretations!). Even contemporary CBT now looks for the client meaning making within the previously “unknowable” Skinnerian black box “O”: S----R.

7. Aggression (the going towards need satisfaction) being a biological necessity for survival and not something to be extinguished or only having to

do with anger and hostility. One can aggress with playfulness, warmth, anger, sexuality, curiosity, intellect, movement, etc.

Fritz Perls, the flawed man and Fritz Perls the genius of psychotherapy in general and of Gestalt Therapy in particular, are not the same. Frequently, his theoretical work is disparaged by ad hominem arguments (womanizer, narcissist, unethical, irresponsible, etc.) which, although containing some grains of truth, don't detract from his brilliance and his seminal contributions to psychotherapy. Fritz not only planted many therapeutic seeds, he also brought to fruition many of the blooms.

Fritz the Iconoclast

Fritz was a dramatic iconoclast. He loved shocking people and exploding what he saw as narrow and restrictive thinking. Frequently, he would proclaim his extreme view and later “walk it back” a bit from what it seemed by adding the ground to his figural statement. This also functioned to support others to come further out with their own views, frequently paling in comparison to Fritz's views. So, what someone might not dare say before (since it might seem too extreme or weird) was OK to say now because it was somewhere between what they said yesterday and what Fritz was saying today. I have said for decades now that he was a mischievous dialectician, many times going for the polarity of shocking people with his pronouncements such as the well-known “lose your mind and come to your senses,” “the intellect is the whore of intelligence,” “you are nothing but a set of obsolete responses,” and especially “The Gestalt Prayer”. “The Gestalt Prayer” is a figure needing *Fritz's* ground to grasp *his* true meaning. Fritz rarely shared his ground when saying these things. These provocative pronouncements generated lively examination and discussion; some of them still do.

As an example, here is an examination of *The Gestalt Prayer*:

The Gestalt Prayer

*I do my thing and you do your thing.
I'm 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.* (Perls, 1969/1988).

Coming out of the post war 1950s U.S. conformist “Madison Avenue advertising templates” of how people *should* be, *should* want, *should* buy (“Father Knows Best,” “The Donna Reed Show” on TV, and building “ticky tacky,”

cookie cutter houses) the Gestalt Prayer is a metaphor for how there is room for everyone to be who they are and some will be compatible with each other and some will not. Trying to fit by being other than you are (mirroring what the other person wants or the cultural imperative) is fundamentally flawed - and doomed.

Here is a translation based on Fritz's (typically unshared) ground at the time:

"I do my thing" I am authentically who I am.

"And you do your thing" You are authentically who you are.

"I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations and you are not in this world to live up to mine." Neither of us has to be who the other wants us to be.

"And if by chance we meet, that's beautiful." When both of us are authentically who we are and we find enough overlap, then we are truly compatible and can enjoy ourselves and each other without inauthentic posturing, which is destined to rupture and explode or collapse into implosion. And realistically, there will always be some friction, and some hurt, in relationships. It is impossible to have an ongoing and close relationship with anyone without some difficulties. *"If not, it can't be helped."* If, when gifting and compromising where you can do it graciously while struggling with each other to see where you can stretch and where you cannot – while honoring your core needs and wants as well as the core needs and wants of the other - you are not compatible then that is the reality and you need to find another more compatible connection. This is not advocating a premature, capricious or unilateral choice, but rather based on authentic, foundational incompatibility. The only way to find out if you are compatible is to authentically "show up." Of course, if it's "all about you" you will soon find you are compatible with nobody and you need to look at that.

Another vignette of Fritz, the dramatic rebel, is him presenting on "oral retention" (primarily based on Laura's work) at an international psychoanalytic conference in the then Czechoslovakia (1930s). Fritz was challenged by the international psychoanalytic president with "Dr. Perls, don't you believe anything retentive is anal?" Perls responded (perhaps apocryphal) with "I didn't know psychoanalysis was based on belief?" This is similar (and again perhaps apocryphal) to the well-known story that on his death bed in a Chicago hospital, Fritz was yanking out all the hospital tubes from his body and when the nurse told him he couldn't do that, he bellowed "Don't *YOU* tell *ME* vat to do!"

Fritz and Jim Simkin

Tears of joy came to my eyes and many memories when Fritz talked about Jim Simkin's "Sufi" story of Tony and his peanut butter sandwiches (*PA*, pp. 45-46). I had heard Jim tell that story dozens of time and at first I laughed at the story evolving and then laughing at Jim's enjoyment of telling the story. It always amazed me that Fritz and Jim both loved and respected each other - Fritz

the free-wheeling, brilliant and impulsive one and Jim the careful, controlled, meticulous and planned one. Fritz, lacking some boundaries and Jim, sometimes stifled by his boundaries. Once, in a training workshop they were disagreeing on some theoretical point. They went back and forth until Jim (politicking his position) looked at Fritz and said: "Look, you were trained by classical analysts and you still have some of that shit left in you. I, however, was lucky enough to be trained by you!" With that, Fritz cried, Jim cried, most of us cried and they hugged. The argument was over, and the difference stood.

Although Jim Simkin loved jokes, he had a strict policy of *never* laughing at anyone else's jokes - usually tightening his face and bracing until the joke was over - then factiously asking when he would hear the punch line. I took it as my job to catch him off guard with jokes - which I was occasionally able to do. Once circa 1971, during an APA (American Psychological Association) convention at the Americana Hotel in Miami Beach, we were at the pool and I told him a rather long joke and the punch line came (I still remember which joke) when Jim was either getting up or sitting down on his chaise lounge. He wasn't braced against laughing so the punch line got to him and he laughed so hard he fell off the chaise lounge on to the ground. We both then roared with laughter. Several months later, that joke re-surfaced as "his" joke, which he told for years. I smiled. Jim rarely remembered where he heard any joke nor where he had already told the joke. I would share the joke here, but times have changed, aesthetics have changed, and that joke is no longer appropriate in today's world.

My very favorite Fritz and Jim story, and most important to me, happened when I was working as therapist with someone in a training group in Simkin's Los Angeles home in the late 1960s with both Fritz and Jim watching. Wow! Whatever I did, one of them seemed to smile and nod approvingly while the other was sticking his finger down his throat and feigning vomiting, or rolling his eyes or putting his head under a lampshade, or pretending to be sleeping and snoring. First Jim looked pleased and Fritz looked critical (they were not very subtle), then they reversed. Finally, I got annoyed and turned to both of them and told them to please "shut the fuck up" and that I was only interested in their points of view after the work was over. To my total dismay, they both independently smiled and actually did behave. I was home - my mini Zen Satori.

Fritz and Laura

Laura Perls (née Posner) parents had difficulty accepting Fritz although both were from Germany and both were born Jewish. Even though Fritz was already a physician they saw themselves as a higher social class. Fritz's father was a wine merchant and not cut from the same "aristocratic" cloth as the Posner's saw themselves. Given this situation, so the story goes, Fritz when invited to dinner

at the Posner home, would lift his soup bowl to his mouth and purposely and loudly slurp his soup – obviously to provoke Laura’s parents – to stick it to them that their daughter was with a boor and to tweak their snobbishness. Being a provocateur was not a therapy or theory building technique with Fritz, it is who he was. While driving Fritz to give a talk at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute in the late 1960s, we stopped at Juniors (his choice, a Jewish delicatessen) and sitting at the counter, he ordered matzoh ball chicken soup and raised the bowl to his mouth and slurped the soup. I laughed and reminded him Laura’s parents weren’t here. He replied with a glint in his eye “I know, I just like to do this now.” He enjoyed unsettling people around him.

To say that Fritz and Laura were both prima donnas would not be an exaggeration. Laura was proud when Fritz (after being separated for years) would call with no advanced warning from the New York airport that he would be “home in 45 minutes.” She loved that he called “their” apartment home, 7 West 96th Street - where he hadn’t lived for years). In their ongoing struggle for dominance – Laura wanting more connection and/or confluence and Fritz wanting more separateness and/or isolation - it seems Laura won, or so the story goes. When Fritz died, he was cremated, and Laura kept his ashes in a box in “their” New York apartment closet. When she was approaching the end of her life, she left New York and returned to her native Germany to die. She brought Fritz’s ashes with her. When she died, she left instructions to be cremated and have her ashes mixed with Fritz’s ashes and be buried together in her family plot in Pforzheim, Germany. Confluent at last and buried in her family plot. Laura won.

Fritz

When Fritz died, March 14,1970, I was sleeping in his bed and doing a Gestalt Therapy training workshop in his living room in his house at Esalen. When he had left on this European opera tour, he was concerned that someone might drive his little Fiat 500 (Cinquecento) that he used to get up and down the hill from his house to the lodge. So, knowing little about cars, he asked someone if there was a part of the car he could take with him to Europe which would ensure nobody could use his car - a whiff of “paranoia”? The person suggested the distributor cap with the wires going to each of the spark plugs. So, Fritz removed the distributor cap and the spark plug wires and travelled around the great opera houses in Europe with the greasy distributor cap in his luggage. Today, he would have trouble explaining to airport security why he was carrying thing.

One month and a day after Fritz died, April 15,1970, my second son was born and we named him Frederik - after Fritz and his maternal Danish grandfather. When “Erik,” as we always and still call him, was about five years

old, he looked at me one day and asked “Daddy, who’s that old dead guy I’m named after?” He did seem to have a bit of Fritz’s mischievousness in him. At university, wanting to play intramural basketball more frequently than once or twice a week, he signed up as the “twins,” Fred and Erik (Frederik) Resnick. He would part his hair on opposite sides of his head for each of them and dreaded if and when their two teams were scheduled to play each other. Either Fred or Erik would have to call in sick.

Fritz and Theory

What I loved about Fritz’s theorizing is that he didn’t concern himself with being perfect the first time out. He would brainstorm out loud and could laugh at himself when he said something ridiculous. He actually would play with the ideas and the experiences like a jazz musician going on a rift - repeatedly coming back to the origin of the variations. Like the best jazz artists, he had the background, disciplined “chops” (aka “procedural memory”), to support his rifts. Polarities, opposites, never linked before, were all fair game. Who else would write, much less publish *In and Out of The Garbage Pail*? While he stressed that “techniques” were the least important part of Gestalt Therapy, he would focus for a while on whatever new toy technique fascinated him at the moment: dreams, dialogue, shuttling and polarities, experiments, two chair, empty chair, creating operas, repeating, amplifying, psychodrama, mime, and more; *all in the service of the methodology of Gestalt Therapy - awareness*. Nothing was prematurely ruled out without being experienced. For several years back then I was able to predict reasonably well when a therapist trained with Fritz, especially if they mistook his techniques du jour (phenotypes) as the core of Gestalt Therapy (genotypes).

Fritz understood (although I never heard him articulate it in this way) that theories, too, in order to stay relevant, must also be “self-regulating” within their ever-changing context. “Theories are always conditioned by and conditioning the state of culture of which they are a part” (*PA*, p. 30).

1. For psychoanalysts in the 1930s, exploring the individual psyche (“unresolved, unconscious conflicts”) or “reinforcement schedules” (for behaviorists) of a person, were how therapists of the day punctuated the part of the field they believed was relevant and essential to focus on and explore. This was the territory of psychotherapy. For Fritz, this was totally myopic. He saw people and all living things as contextual: co-created in interaction with their world. Field theory and the organismic/environmental field are needed to understand a human being and any living organism. Fritz Perls, the first “relational” therapist!

2. The particular type of “relational” therapy context for Fritz (Martin Buber) is the transparent (with modulated clinical judgement) meeting of, and the

engagement with, the client by the therapist with both the therapist “showing up” (presence) and the therapist being impacted by the client (inclusion) - all without the therapist trying to control the outcome (commitment to dialogue). When the client knows how they impacted the therapist, they then know they have been received. When the client knows the therapist’s reaction to that impact, they then know that they have been met.

3. The centrality of the relationship between the client and the therapist regardless of modality, which research today shows is 30% of the variance of therapy outcome. This circa 1930s Perls’s heretical notion is a foundational part of most current models of therapy today, including contemporary psychoanalysis. This is far more than the “therapeutic alliance.”

4. The normalizing (depathologizing) of existential anxiety. Taking existential anxiety out of the pathological and accepting it as a very real part of being self-reflective and human.

5. Identifying fixed perceptual organizations or fixed perceptual gestalts, reframed by some today as Schema theory. These unaware fixed perceptual organizations constitute half of “character.” The other half are fixed and unaware behavioral responses. Here I also think of linguists Edward Sapir (mentor to Benjamin Whorf) and the Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis: “language is a mold into which infant minds are poured.”

6. The importance and honoring of the phenomenological organization and meaning making of the client is not to be colonized by the imposed phenomenological organization and meaning making of the therapist or theorist. (Interpretations!). Even contemporary CBT now looks for the client meaning making within the previously “unknowable” Skinnerian black box “O”: S-O-R.

7. Aggression (the going towards need satisfaction) being a biological necessity for survival and not something to be extinguished or only having to do with anger and hostility. One can aggress with playfulness, warmth, anger, sexuality, curiosity, intellect, movement, etc.

Otherwise, theories that might have fit well in the situation where they were created can soon become outdated and obsolete as long as people and the environment are changing. Fixed theories quickly become theoretical “character structures.” Although he mistakenly used the term “homeostasis” when he talked about self-regulation which is relevant to mechanical systems where the return is to a set point (like a thermostat set at 20C or 68F), he was *actually* talking about living biological systems which are correctly related to “homeorhesis,” a return to an ecological trajectory of balance and *not* a return to a set point. The term “homeorhesis,” describing living systems returning to a trajectory of balance, was not coined until 1941 and few, including Fritz, had ever heard of it nor is it even well known today.

Fritz and Certification of Gestalt Therapists

Fritz, based on his history with the international psychoanalytic community, was very much against any hierarchical or centralized organizations of accreditation for psychoanalytic training institutes and psychoanalysts – or Gestalt Therapy. He was particularly offended when, after supporting him and Laura opening a psychoanalytic training institute in Johannesburg, South Africa, the international psychoanalytic hierarchy later declared that only psychoanalytic trainers doing training in Europe would be fully accredited. No doubt also influenced by Paul Goodman (who embraced anarchy) and ideas that all structures were prone to corruption, Fritz staunchly opposed any kind of centralized certification of Gestalt Therapists.

By the late '60s, however, he became very concerned with the damage being done to people and to the reputation of Gestalt Therapy by untrained opportunists and well-meaning incompetents imploring people to just “do what you feel” with little regard for others. A license for psychopathy. So, with these changing field conditions, Fritz changed his mind. The damages of no certification became heavier than the potential damages of certification. In August 1969, Fritz, along with Jim Simkin and Irma Lee Shephard, conducted the first and only Gestalt Therapy Certification Weekend at the Esalen Institute. About 20 candidates were examined (working live and then being questioned by the Gestalt troika) and about 10-12 were certified. A few others were “grand parented” in with certification, two of the most prominent being Laura Perls and Isadore From. Both Laura and Isadore were furious that Fritz had the nerve to think he could certify them. Fritz died on March 14, 1970 so the certification weekend never happened again. There were several attempts to find a way to continue with certification with meetings at Jim Simkin's Big Sur home including representatives from institutes across the U.S. and some from Europe, but agreement seemed impossible. The challenge was, and is, “who picks the pickers?” Of course, there were ways to do this, but the fundamental motivation was not there and the ambivalence was. This might be different today.

Fritz and the “Gloria” Film

Although I have real objections to Fritz's “Gloria” film (Shostrom, 1965), some of Fritz's films are beautiful, caring, supportive and warm, such as *Madeline's Dream* (Perls, 1969b) and *Birth of a Composer* (Perls, 1968). Much of his work that was not filmed, was tender and nuanced. When filmed, he seemed somewhat urgent (perhaps anxious?) and less patient. When doing a demonstration with an audience and not a training group his “urgency” quickly escalated - whether filmed or not. He needed to do a good session where something happened. I wasn't there for the Gloria filming but I'm sure his urgency/anxiety increased exponentially for this when they filmed this one session, and this would be his

only shot – knowing all the while that Gloria would also have sessions with Carl Rogers and Albert Ellis. While he was “right on” in many of his comments to Gloria, he was provocative, not dialogic and way too much the expert. My guess is his provocateur was trying to get a “real” reaction from Gloria although he was not real in expressing his motivation. Hardly dialogic.

Of course, there are some shadows cast by some of Fritz’s demonstration films. This is especially true of “Gloria,” as it has become so widespread and in some places is presented as defining Gestalt Therapy. Remember, he was both a genius *and* an asshole. Unfortunately, the cherry-picked examples of some films combined with Fritz’s behavior when doing demonstrations have morphed into a very pejorative, what some call “Perlsian” or “old style” Gestalt Therapy. “Perls bashing,” which is very popular in some quarters, essentializes him as almost all bad. This eclipses his brilliance, courage, humanity and seminal contributions.

“Old School” and “Perlsian” Gestalt Therapy

Somehow, two different ideations of “old style” Gestalt Therapy have been conflated/confabulated – usually (but not always), inadvertently. The first is the classical existential, field theoretical, phenomenological and dialogic – emphasizing a process and awareness model. This is what Fritz Perls and Jim Simkin taught me, and for that I am forever grateful. Of course, each of these giants, being human, had their own foibles.

The second confabulation evolved from abuses by poorly trained (or untrained), self-proclaimed “Gestalt Therapists.” This group includes some charlatan “sociopaths,” some well-meaning incompetents, misguided zealots, and some of Perls’s own personal negative traits. The result is a distorted, abusive, cathartic, shaming and sometimes disregarding-of-otherness approach. Over the years, however, the cumulative alloy label “old style” has become a pejorative – while in some circles, “relational” models, importing psychoanalytic ideas back into Gestalt Therapy from contemporary psychoanalysis, are seen as the antidote to the alleged pandemic abusiveness of “old style” Gestalt Therapy. Fritz, in initiating Gestalt Therapy Certification in 1969, was in his own way of trying to modify these abuses.

The words “relational” and “relational turn” were imported from the philosophical and contemporary psychoanalytic intersubjective worlds. Unfortunately, in the context of Gestalt Therapy, these terms sometimes imply that Gestalt Therapists who don’t rebrand as “relational,” or are not actively advocating Levinas’s “relational turn,” are not “relational” and are somehow “less than,” and maybe even among the shaming, mean and abusive, boorish few of past “old style” and “Perlsian” abusers.

To use the Irish expression which I learned from the Merleau-Ponty scholar Des Kennedy, an Irish Gestalt Therapist, this indictment is “Uisce fe thalamh”

(transliteration “*ishka fway holev*”) meaning “water just below the surface.” In some fields, when you step on the seemingly dry grass, the water squishes up all around your shoes.

In reality, of course, all therapy is relational. From a manualized CBT protocol to an existential encounter, there is always some kind of relationship – distant, aseptic, dialogic, mechanical, hierarchical, expert, distant, etc. What’s important is the kind and quality of that relationship.

Gestalt Therapy is clearly dialogic, noisy exceptions and abuses of a few notwithstanding, and always has been. The current “relational” emphasis, according to some Gestalt Therapists, also seems to function as a way to introduce (actually re-introduce through the back door) some specific psychoanalytic ideas back into the Gestalt Therapy that Fritz and Laura eschewed. For example, “interpretations” are now sometimes reframed as “experiments” and not the highly likely phenomenological imposition of the therapist’s point of view on the meaning of the client’s experience within a hierarchical/expert system. Frequently, the therapist’s interpretation is privileged over the client’s experience in this hierarchical, power relationship. Rather than an infrequent, “held lightly” therapist speculation occurring in the *therapist’s* fantasy (the locus being in the therapist as in classic Gestalt Therapy), it morphs into an alleged description of the other. For some, interpretation becomes a major methodological practice of “relational” Gestalt Therapy. This is one of the foundational issues that Fritz and Laura broke away from in their shift away from classic psychoanalysis in their time. For Fritz, “all interpretations are projections,” whether they turn out to have any accuracy or not. How could they be anything other than projections where the client’s figure is then connected to the ground that the therapist brings to the table consisting of who he/she is, their theoretical bias, their privileged theorists (now we have the theorist’s phenomenological organization of “reality” – written down and now called theory), and more. Meaning is the relationship between figure and ground – not in the figure and not in the ground, but rather in the *relationship* between figure and ground. Therapist interpretations are, to a large part, predicated on the ground *that therapist brings to the situation* and when believed to be about the other they are clearly projections. The colonization of meaning making.

In some circles, unfortunately, “relational” also gives license for therapists to stay primarily cognitive with their stories, theories, explanations, interpretations, speculations about the client, associations, etc. and not really be there with registering the clients impact on them at the moment and sharing their responses to that impact. It can look dialogic when a therapist shares intimate stories (and even emotions) about their past and/or about other areas of their lives now (past and sideways) *but not happening in the present involvement with the person sitting in front of them*. What’s happening in the present are reflections about

either another time or another place, appearing to be dialogic, with little real time vulnerability and humanity. Fritz, in my view, would surely bristle and vehemently disagree.

While appreciating that some forms of contemporary psychoanalysis have discovered the value of having and paying attention to the actual and co-created therapist/client relationship, this is nothing new to Gestalt Therapy, rather, “old wine in new bottles.”

What’s Important to Me About Fritz’s Manuscript

The situation. Perhaps the most outstanding part of *Psychopathology of Awareness* for me is his defining letting one’s actions being “controlled” (informed, implicated, by the situation - with the larger field being part of that situation) as “wisdom,” or “what’s due the situation” to quote Laura Perls. “To let the ‘situation’ control one’s action is the essence of wisdom” (PA, p. 27).

Importantly, the person does not just meet the situation, the person *is* an inexorable part of the situation. Person and environment are one just as is the organismic/environmental field; they cannot be meaningfully separated. What’s *due* the situation must include both the person and the environment. This is the ecology² of a human being’s relationship with their world. As any part of the situation changes – the person, the environment, the larger field, etc. – what’s *due* the situation may likely change too. If what’s due the situation becomes frozen, we then have “duty” (that which is implored no matter what the situation), acontextual and anachronistic. At the anthropological/sociological/cultural level, this process is the same as at the individual’s level of organization/character formation/fractals of each other. This is the essence of homeorhesis (*not* homeostasis) and self-regulation – meaning both self-regulation *within* the person and self-regulation *between* the person and their environment.

Self-regulation. In recent years, the idea of “self-regulation” has become somewhat unpopular in some Gestalt Therapy circles with the derogatory accusation that it comes from a “one-person” psychology. In *Psychopathology of Awareness* Perls again makes clear:

“we are built in a way of self-organization with the tendency for self-regulating balance *but also with the striving for balancing the organism-environmental relatedness* [emphasis added]. Look at the total situation (ecological view): “The organism-as-a-whole-embedded-in-an-environment!” (PA, p. 29).

Perls was *not* talking about self-regulation as just about “me” but clearly seeking a balance within me and a balance between and among me *and* my

2. That branch of biology concerned with relationships of organisms and their physical surroundings.

world. It is particularly ironic to attribute a one-person psychology to Perls and “old school” Gestalt Therapy when it was Perls who was the very first major theorist to break away from the classical psychoanalytic idea of punctuating treatment to include only the individual and their unresolved unconscious conflicts. In this regard, Perls may have been influenced by Wilhelm Reich, one of his analysts, who became interested in “why is this patient telling me this now?” The American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan was also involving the social matrix in personality and character formation and Perls found receptive ears to his work in Sullivan along with Erich Fromm, Clara Thompson, and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann at the William Alanson White Institute, founded in 1943 three years before Fritz and Laura arrived in New York City. Karen Horney, one of Fritz’s analysts who had already migrated to New York, was helpful in connecting Fritz to the White Institute. This “school” was also heavily influenced by the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi “who pioneered the analyst’s authentic use of himself in the consulting room, emphasizing the mutuality of the relationship between therapist and client” (William Alanson White Institute, n.d.). In the U.S. in the mid-1940s, the William Alanson White Institute was one of the very few places Fritz Perls and his ideas were welcomed.

Gestalt Therapy theory of change. In 1968 Jim Simkin and I produced a Festschrift for Fritz’s seventy-fifth birthday party at the American Psychological Association Convention in San Francisco at the Miyako Hotel. It consisted of articles, poems and artwork from his students. Although Laura Perls was not there, Fritz was walking all around the room of several hundred birthday good wishers proudly showing them the sweater Laura had sent him for his birthday. Fritz told me the most important article in the Festschrift was Arnie Beisser’s now iconic “The Paradoxical Theory of Change” (Beisser, 1970, n.d.). He said my article, “Chicken Soup Is Poison” (Resnick, n.d.) was second. Arnie’s brilliant piece, however, was misunderstood by some that awareness alone was always sufficient for change to happen. While this is frequently true for so called “intrapsychic” (yes, I know, there are no really “intrapsychic” issues), this formulation falls short when dealing with issues that involve the rest of the world and/or the person’s orientation towards that world. In *Psychopathology of Awareness*, Fritz is clear: in order for change to happen both the *sensory and motoric systems* must be involved. The person must actually *do* something. The *doing* of something produces new experiential information that can be useful even if not always pleasant. “Thus we realize that awareness alone is not sufficient to bring satisfaction. We have to ‘do’ something about it” (PA, p. 39).

Frequently, Fritz would talk about “awareness plus aggression.” As a non-native English speaker I don’t think he fully realized the strong *connotative* meaning of “aggression” in English. The word “aggression” as figure has a very

strong attachment to the ground of anger and hostility. He meant “movement towards.” It probably would have been better for him to substitute something like “experiment” or just “movement towards” instead of “aggression.”

“End gain” and “means whereby.” I have always found the end gain (goal) and means whereby (how) distinction very important and extremely useful both theoretically and clinically. All needs are typically healthy – with a few exceptions such as psychosis and organic damage. Not all means whereby are congruent with self-regulation within the person’s environment.

However, I strongly disagree here with Fritz’s unfortunate example in this manuscript about sex:

“The end gain of sex is always fixed: the orgasm. A person might know no other was to come to this goal except through homosexuality. If this person becomes capable of accepting his attitude without any reservation, and only then, he ‘wakes up’. Then he can change his position, his ‘means whereby’, for instance, to heterosexuality. (*PA*, p. 39)

I wish he had used any of many examples where the content would not be so offensive – which easily deflects from the concept.³ While it is true that almost all needs are healthy and, for most people, their difficulties are related to their means whereby and not their needs, Perls to me is “off the rails” here. I was astonished to read this and totally disagree. Frequently, the end gain of sex is *not* orgasm – it can be connection, pride, dominance, tactile stimulation, winning, fun, intimacy, babies, anxiety reduction, and more. If it were so that the endgame of sex is always orgasm, then masturbation would take care of everything. I was astonished to see Perls in this 1965 manuscript talking about homosexuality as related to fixation and perversity. “This applies to any fixation on any perversity” (*PA*, p. 39).

This idea eclipses the differences in arousal predicated by same sex or other sex and implicitly assumes that sexual arousal is always the same regardless of the sex of the other. There is no evidence for this and much evidence that it is not true. I was actually shocked to read this from Perls as I never heard him say *anything* like that in the five years I knew and trained with him, from 1965 to 1970. I read this section several times trying to make sure I didn’t misunderstand him. I would like it very much if I did misunderstand him. Hopefully, it was just one of his speculative ramblings, unencumbered with what was already known and was soon to be discarded.

The only example I know where this is true is in male prison homosexuality

3. For example, much substance abuse (food, alcohol, drugs) are a means whereby to deal with (anesthetize, self-soothe, substitute) such needs (end gains) as lack of connection, loneliness, distancing from difficult feelings; for example, anger, sadness or fear and trauma.

which, for most, is usually a temporary substitute for heterosexuality and is discontinued upon release from prison. Of course, sex has to do with orgasm - but more so in prison to hierarchy, dominance, reputation, power and status. In working with sexual orientation, I always observed Perls being accepting of the entire range of sexual desires – even receptive to what today would be called “non-binary” – with others and even about himself. This example of sex as only for orgasm and the alleged interchangeability of means whereby of homosexuality or heterosexuality is a serious anomaly of the Fritz Perls I knew.

The place of the past. “What is important to therapy is not the past, but what of the past is still present” (*PA*, p. 20). This lays the groundwork to access the relevant past in the present functioning of the client, especially within the dialogic relationship. Here the therapist doesn’t have to interpret, speculate, etc. The relevant past (especially as it is interrupting self-regulation and healthy functioning in the present) is palpable and experience near – character in vivo. It is accessible, observable, experiential, and experimentable. Character is the pollutant of self-regulation and healthy (situationally congruent) functioning. As the ecologists suggest, a “pollutant” is “a resource out of place.” It may be very useful, positive, and even lifesaving in one context/situation and deadly in another. For example, a fur coat in Siberia in February is a creative adjustment that can keep you alive while that same fur coat when worn in Karachi in July can kill you.

Fusion/fissure (fusion/fission). Following from disagreement with Freud’s embracing of the Eros/Thanatos conflict theory of life Fritz morphs into the following:

the two basic functions of matter, fusion and fissure, are involved in any change that occurs, we can easily accept libido as a representative of fusion and Thanatos, destruction, de-composition (possibly as a result of hostile aggression) as representing fissure. (*PA*, pp. 22-23)

For Perls, this gives rise to polarities and dialectics – thesis, antithesis, synthesis (*PA*, pp. 23-26). Perls sees both fusion and fissure as necessary processes. In his words “differentiation and integration appear as the essence of growth” (*PA*, 9. 25). He clearly grasps that the organism and the environment are a whole with each a part of the gestalt formations. You can’t really know a living organism (especially a person) without an understanding of their relationship with their environment. “The atmosphere of a party influences our mood, and our mood influences the party, thus creating vicious or beneficial circles” (*PA*, p. 30).⁴

4. Interesting note: In Plato’s Symposium (360 B.C.), Zeus and the other gods are concerned that people were not worshipping them enough so they decided to cut everyone in half so that they would have to move around on only two legs and threatened to again cut them in half if that

Perspective

“In short, any understanding is based upon perspective in depth, upon the ability to see the total situation and the parts as differentiation of that totality. Otherwise one does not see the forest for all the trees.” (PA, p. 27)

In order to have perspective, one must have at least two lenses. *It is the differences between and among the lenses that creates perspective.* Again, difference allows awareness. Even our two eyes with their only slightly differences in perceiving, provide enough difference (binocular parallax) that our depth perception drops substantially when using only one eye. As the Chilean biologists Francisco Maturana and Humberto Varela point out, we can only look through a lens. Thus, the lens you use will both *determine and limit* what you see (Maturana & Varela, 1998/2008). As Einstein pointed out, how you observe determines what you observe. Gestalt Therapy, with our “zoom” lens, can change our “depth of field” and focus genetically, biochemically, characterologically, individually, and dyadically with groups, families, communities, politics, countries, the planet, the weather, climate change, on and on. We can modulate what part of the field (and therefore what lenses) seem relevant to that situation. As I love to quote myself, “If you only use a microscope, you will never see an elephant.”

Coda

Being privy to *Psychopathology of Awareness*, circa 1965, even in this nascent form, has been a pleasure. This gives me a window into some of the lenses Fritz was using during my time with him. Of course, he did not stop theorizing in 1965. His exploration remained fresh and ongoing until his death.

Meeting, training with, and knowing Fritz Perls and Jim Simkin is no doubt the pinnacle and the nexus of my professional life. Personally, I may have been the luckiest psychotherapist in the world when Fritz asked me to introduce

didn't work - meaning that people would have to hop around on only one leg. With the initial cut from four legs to two, people were running around - but not reproducing - thus limiting the birth of future worshippers. In order to correct this, the god's decided to move the genitals to the front of each person, between the hips (I don't even want to think about where the genitals might have been before) so that they would gravitate towards each other searching for restoration of their wholeness - and then, stimulated, get involved in sex and having babies. The gods decided to name that movement toward each other in search of the re-establishment of wholeness and completion, Eros (love). Still today, this appears to be part of both the secular and religious ground for western culture's "two become one" fusion model of marriage and referencing a partner as "my other (or better) half" or looking for "my other half". Most major religions follow this same theme in their rhetoric, rituals, and pronouncements. "Ye shall leave your mother and father and cleave to one another and become one flesh," which is a relatively recent (Old Testament, Genesis, some 4,000-5,000 years ago) pronouncement of this much older than that cultural imperative.

Gestalt Therapy to Europe in 1969. This gave (and gives) me access to teaching and learning in Europe multiple times per year for over fifty years. This also means I have been (and still am) vulnerable to being seen, challenged and met by both Gestalt Therapists and therapists from many different models – some supportive, some “creatively indifferent,” and some openly critical and even occasionally hostile. Being exposed to (and being seen by) clinicians, academics, different generations, different cultures, and different orientations has been, for me, an ongoing crucible of learning, refining and fostering new integrations. This is an extremely rare (and sometimes daunting) opportunity and for this I am forever grateful.

My thanks to Charlie Bowman and Jean-Marie Robine for inviting me to participate. I hope my oscillating from the personal to the theoretical has added to and not detracted from, the goal of this project.

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