

Introduction to Gestalt

Gestalt is not primarily an intellectual psychology. By this, I mean that it's not intended to be experienced first by way of the intellect and by abstractions and concepts. In this respect, as in a good many others, it resembles Freudian therapeutic approach, from which it partly derives.

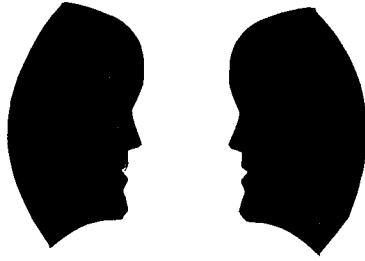
The Gestalt invitation clarified

My hope in the chapters that follow, is to make more vivid, to discover or rediscover your own meaning, as a function of you and your setting at any moment.

It is convenient to label the different psychologies -Freudian, Jungian, Adlerian, and Gestalt, for example. I am impatient, though, of any brand-naming of what is at once so immensely simple and deeply mysterious as the relation of the animals we are with the rest of the known and unknown universe. When I say in Gestalt we do this, or in Gestalt we do that I do not at all suppose that thousands of people in different ages, and different countries, have not glimpsed the same perceptions that I am encouraging you towards when I use these words. That is a preface to saying that, like the old Zen masters, like Don Juan in modern Mexico as described by Carlos Castaneda, Fritz Perls and the earlier Gestalt psychologists want to remind us that to *explain* the world from within the constraints of our culture, is a limited and a limiting way of dealing with immensity.

That statement is likely to be a very uncomfortable one for most academics to live with. And I suppose that one day somebody will write a neat and respectable academic book of Perlsian Gestalt. If they do, it will be a violation of what it purports to explain. I am aware that this introduction, which is an explanation of not - explaining, is in itself a partial violation of Gestalt method. To justify me, I remember the floundering anger I have so often perceived in Westerners, who are so used to first imagining that they have grasped truth via their intellect, that they will not trust themselves or their teacher until they have some kind of answer to the un - Gestalt question 'Why?'

Consider, though, that far the greater part of all psychology, of whatever school, is a matter of assumptions rather than demonstrable knowledge. The collective unconscious is an exciting assumption; the Electra complex is another exciting and so far a useful assumption. Both of these are concepts which appear to explain phenomena many of us experience at least partially. They may only appear to explain these phenomena.



To take a more fundamental example, one at the heart of every therapeutic style, I have never yet discovered any explanation which appears validly to account for another phenomenon which is experienced in any successful therapeutic encounter. This is the moment or the process of transformation from confusion, or distress, or despair, through to a new sense of the self. Anybody who has been through this experience will instantly recognise what I am talking about. The therapists of different schools will offer as a rule quite exhaustive explanations of what has taken place to bring about this new perception of the self and the world around us. Yet such different processes are undergone in for example, Freudian, or Jungian analysis, in Reichian therapy, in bio-energetics, in primal therapy, in trans-actonal analysis or in Gestalt, to name only some of the recognised formal therapies, that I suspect more and more that the ritual which leads to the therapeutic transformation is less important than the therapists of the different schools generally maintain. It seems possible to me that it is an act of faith for the Freudian therapist to insist on the exploration of the transference and the Gestalt therapist to insist on the proper experience of fragmentation, polarisation, and reintegration. I have cited these two processes because they are in many ways contradictory to each other, and yet both demonstrably enable people to reach what I have called the therapeutic transformation, or different experience of the self and different ability to cope in the world.

So even before I have spread a rug under your feet, I feel that I have tugged at it, if not pulled it away. I have composed a book which may enable you to teach yourself quite fully how to experience Gestalt therapy as facilitator or as worker. I shall insist from chapter to chapter on Gestalt method, asking you not to confuse this way of working with others you may know already - especially not with intellectual or explaining ways of working with people. And at the same time, I ask you to be aware that you alone will know when you are living **you** in a way that is right for you. Your way may violate, may transcend or transfer, the assumptions of every psychology yet invented.

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