Editorial

Figuring Out the “Real Consequences of Actions”: A Gestalt Perspective

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The title for this editorial was inspired by Susan E. Goodman’s personal reflection on aspects of her father’s philosophical vision, as recounted in an interview generously granted in Vienna to Beatrix Wimmer (with Nancy Amendt-Lyon, Stefan Blankertz, and Andreas Weichselbraun) on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary Paul Goodman’s birth:

Do your job carefully with awareness of what you’re doing. Pay attention to the impact you have on others, what the consequences of your actions are, and what all of the consequences are. Pay attention to what you take account of, and what you do not. . . . To think that through carefully, taking everything important into account, is a lot of effort but it really matters.

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In an intimate and forthright portrayal of her relationship with her father, his ideas, and his legacy within the world of Gestalt therapy and beyond, Goodman provides insight into the cultural, social, and political life in the USA of the forties, fifties, and sixties to which the Goodman family contributed.

Billy Desmond’s dense if timely paper, “Sustainability in a Fragile Ecological Era: A Gestalt Therapist’s Response,” invites us, in line with Goodman, to figure out the “real consequences of actions” vis-à-vis the world view or Weltanschauung of this century, positing that some of the underlying assumptions that appear to shape our creative adjustments are insufficient. The hope is that our Gestalt therapy practice may encourage novel responses that sustain and nourish our planet and its inhabitants by such actions as: “(1) extending the field to include a wider ecology of relational interactions; (2) moving from configuring our ecological problem as a crisis to one of supporting creativity; (3) attending to our sensorial, animating intersubjective bodies rooted in a relational field; (4) fostering a practice of radical inclusion.” Significantly, Desmond reminds us in the first sentence that people “who separate themselves from nature have to live every minute of their lives without the power, joy, and freedom of nature,” thereby underscoring the legacy of the social critic, anarchist philosopher, and public intellectual.

In “‘Structured Ground’: Heresy or Cutting Edge,” Gunaketu Bjørn Kjønstad is also concerned with a way to figure out the “real consequence of actions,” broaching the theme of the complexity and interdependency of today’s world. He re-explores Gordon Wheeler’s (1991) concept of “Structured Ground,” critically defined by Gary Yontef (1992) as “slowly changing processes that organize other processes” (p. 107), and posits that the concept can provide a starting point for a model that will guide our reflections and actions. For Kjønstad, going “beyond an unbalanced focus on the ‘Self’ or ‘personality function’ reminds us to be aware beyond the moment, and can help us create helpful structures to take care of the environment on which we are vitally dependent.” The concept of “Structured Ground,” according to the author, draws together matters such as mirror neurons, communication technology, and environment in new and different ways.

This issue of Gestalt Review features as well a substantive personal reflection, an expansive book commentary on Gestalt methodology and management, and several standard book reviews on clinical issues.

Michael Fisher, in “Into the Unknown: Contact and Awareness at Esalen,” offers a beautifully penned account of his consequential encounter with self and other at that time-honored California institution. “At unforeseen moments,” he says of the fleeting if transcendent culmination of the experience, “I felt a new foundation for relating to other people and the natural environment. I arrived already loved. Latent capacities within me were
unleashed; hitherto unknown parts of myself realized.” Fisher also appears, synchronistically, in the Vienna interview with Susan Goodman, expressing his surprise, along with others, in response to her thoughts about Paul Goodman’s “disconnectedness” regarding “what he said, and what he did, around sexuality.”

In his reflective review of Lars Marmgren’s *People at Work: Gestalt Methodology and Management*, Jochen Lohmeier places the content of the book’s eight chapters—largely relevant, for the reviewer, to contemporary Sweden as an industrialized capitalist market society—in the context of his own life experience as a geographer, economist, planner, facilitator, OD-intervener, and coach on the issue of socioeconomic development for mass poverty reduction in sustainable ways. Marmgren, too, is concerned with the “real consequence of actions,” for he observes at the outset that in today’s business world “too much emphasis is placed on efficiency and performance, and too little on the humanity of those who perform.” He advocates, finally, for effective organizations, cooperation, and Gestalt methodology and management.

Nancy Amendt-Lyon’s novel, *Case Unclosable*, was, according to Detlef Klöckner’s review originally published in German, “written in a Gestalt therapeutic manner through and through.” The narration, which circles around the early loss of the father and the unresolved drama resurfacing in the form of nightmares is, as stated by Klöckner, in the hands an experienced Gestalt therapist who is also someone who writes “damn well.” Happily, the reviewer does not reveal what lurks behind the twists and turns of the storyline, but he does entice us with hints of its empathic effect.

Certain practical ideas from Brian O’Neill’s book, *Couples’ Therapy: A Gestalt Approach*, have proved useful to the pragmatic side of reviewer Bud Feder (e.g., being aware of “three client selves” in working with couples). Though he praises the richness of the book’s content, Feder himself resonates less with its theoretical aspects; for example, with the author’s concept of the “Gestalt Hologram”: an integration of practice, philosophy, personality theory, phenomenology, field theory, existentialism, and even behaviorism.

For Vincent Beja, Desmond Kennedy’s *Healing Perception: An Application of the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty to the Theoretical Structures of Dialogic Psychotherapy*, is, at the end of the day, a call back to the roots, back to working with clients in the light of the subtleties espoused by the French philosopher. Many of Merleau-Ponty’s principal constructs are deemed, by author and reviewer alike, to be more congenial to Gestalt therapy than those of Husserl or Heidegger. Beja adds that those who have little knowledge or no understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s work will benefit from Kennedy’s introduction to the subject.

Peter Cole finds Miriam Taylor’s book, *Trauma Therapy and Clinical Practice*: 
Neuroscience, Gestalt, and the Body, to be a major contribution to Gestalt therapy's clinical literature. He highlights especially the “gems” of the “Window of Tolerance” (i.e., “finding and, over time expanding, the sweet spot in which the client is neither hyper-aroused nor hypo-aroused”); and the “Integrated Model of Change” (i.e., “change happens under the optimal conditions in which one can be fully oneself”).

This issue of Gestalt Review closes with an obituary jointly written by Gro Skottun and Daan van Baalen on the occasion of the sudden and tragic passing of Ken Evans. A highly respected colleague, practitioner, researcher—and human being—he will be sorely missed in the Gestalt community and beyond.

As a final word, founding editor Joseph Melnick and current editor Susan Fischer invite you, our readers, to celebrate in 2016 the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Gestalt Review. We mark this milestone by offering a special issue of the journal dedicated to Gestalt therapy and diversity considerations (20.3), guest-edited jointly by JON FREW (Professor of Psychology at the Pacific University School of Professional Psychology and co-director of the Gestalt Therapy Training Center, Northwest) and Gestalt-trained DEBORAH PLUMMER (Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Medical School).

The premise of the special issue, as Frew explains, is that Gestalt therapy exists in a different set of field conditions now than it did in the 1950s and 1960s when it was first developed. Practitioners are more diverse. Clients are more diverse. Times have changed. Given the context then and now, one cannot but reflect on the ways in which Gestalt therapy theory and practice can (and must) adapt creatively in order to be relevant and meet client needs. An impressive group of writers, veteran and young, has been assembled to comment on clinical and organizational/systems applications of Gestalt in a diverse world: Philip Belzunce, Tim Ewing, Sabin Fernbacher, Jon Frew, LaLei Gutierrez, Lynne Jacobs, Greer Jordan, Deborah Plummer, and Herb Stevenson.

Our hope is that you, our readers, will support this exciting endeavor (and future ones) by contributing to Gestalt Review as authors of articles and commentaries, writers of reflections, reviewers of books, and subscribers to the journal—and encouraging others in your workplace, or where other spheres of influence exist, to do the same. At this anniversary time, we are simultaneously moving forward and looking back as we work to make early issues of the journal available for purchase on line, thereby allowing all readers, long-standing and new, to dip into its archive. We will keep you posted!

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REFERENCES
