Editorial

Endings—And New Beginnings

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This issue of Gestalt Review is characterized by endings and new beginnings. First, this is the last issue of the journal that will be published and distributed by the Gestalt International Study Center and supported by the first-rate graphic work of Judy Robertson Designs (Sarasota, Florida). Thank you, Judy Robertson, for having stolidly executed the journal’s graphics since 2004, for a total of 39 issues! Beginning with issue 22.1, to appear in early 2018, Gestalt Review will be designed, published, and disseminated by The Pennsylvania State University Press Journals Division. Not only will it move to both a print and digital delivery format, but all back issues will be available digitally for purchase on line. Individual subscriptions to the Review will continue to be procurable through GISC and will encompass both digital and print formats, as will subscriptions to the Review included with a GISC professional membership. Here we have a new beginning for the journal: Gestalt Review will see greater flexibility for its readers, wider (inter)national distribution, and a potential to

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increase its readership base beyond the confines of the Gestalt community.

Another ending concerns the passing, on 10 September 2017, of Sonia March Nevis at the age of 90. She helped found the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland in 1956, where she created the Center for Intimate Systems devoted to the training of couples and family therapists, and she was co-founder (with Edwin C. Nevis) of the Gestalt International Study Center. Her departure marks the end of an era not just for GISC but for the (Gestalt) world-at-large. Since a forthcoming issue of Gestalt Review (22.1) will be dedicated to her memory and contain a detailed in memoriam tribute penned by Joseph Melnick, as well as a number of shorter testimonials, here I shall address only briefly the tremendous void left by her passing. I offer below an adapted portion of what I wrote for her memorial ceremony held at GISC on 1 October 2017 in the spirit, not of looking backwards at all that Sonia Nevis achieved—created, shared, taught, modeled, discharged—but of reflecting on how her ending has impacted many of us now, and how it has the potential to move us forward toward new beginnings:

Sonia March Nevis’s death is a deeply cataclysmic event for those of us connected to GISC, and for those of us who knew her throughout the Gestalt community and beyond, in whatever capacity. The phrase that keeps coming to my mind—virtually forming a “fixed Gestalt”—is that of “the sense of an ending”: the title of a book by Frank Kermode, a twentieth-century literary critic, whose “brilliance,” David Lodge once wrote in a review of the book, was “genuine.” Kermode speaks about “fictions of the End—about ways in which, under varying existential pressures, we have imagined the ends of the world” (p. 5). He starts with the Apocalypse and posits that

the great majority of interpretations of the Apocalypse assume that the End is pretty near. Consequently, the historical allegory is always having to be revised; time discredits it. . . . Apocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited. This is part of its extraordinary resilience. (p. 5; emphasis added)

Sonia’s passing may be one of those so-called fictions of the end,

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1 When my mentor, Professor John W. Kronik of Cornell University, died in 2006, I was invited to chair an academic session in his honor at the national meeting of the Modern Language Association—with specific guidelines, which are easy to miss: focus not on what he did during his lifetime but on his legacy for the future, the impact of his work for others. Every member of the panel erred on that point: they went backward instead of forward, recounting all that John Kronik had contributed, and were therefore asked to re-focus their paper proposals. I learned from that experience. Consequently, I want to focus here not so much on what Sonia March Nevis did in her lifetime but on how she still impacts in the present and, by extension, how she will impact in the future.
signaling the closure of a cycle, but her extraordinary—apocalyptic—resilience will remain eternally present to propel the cycle anew. May Peace be upon her: Aleha ha-shalom.

This issue of Gestalt Review opens, however fortuitously, with Melnick and S. Nevis’s article entitled “Optimism” which, in some sense, posits a philosophy of new beginnings. For Melnick, optimism is “not a belief that something good will happen, for it will or will not. It is not a guess concerning the future.” S. Nevis clarifies further: “Optimism is about having the courage to try things. It is about stepping into something because we hope it will be a good thing, without knowing what will happen.” To which Melnick aptly adds: “It is also about learning not to stay attached to the negative when things do not turn out in ways we had hoped.” A pessimistic perspective, on the other hand, is not “expansive” but “narrowing,” “tense” rather than “relaxed,” “fearful” rather than “courageous,” “backward” as opposed to “forward-leaning.”

Michael C. Fisher gives us Part III of his trilogy of essays on “(Gestalt) Pathways of Dissemination,” focusing above all on the evolution of Esalen: by late 1967, it was “a nationally recognized fount of human potential ideas and practices, which would soon spread throughout the country.” But despite Esalen’s growing fame, a series of internal conflicts dominated the seat of the human potential movement, and most interesting for Gestaltists, “the most noticeable of these conflicts centered on one man: Fritz Perls.” Fisher’s article provides a detailed account of the advent of Perls.

Giancarlo Pintus, in “Addiction as Persistent Traumatic Experience: Neurobiological Processes and Good Contact,” attempts to create a “fruitful exchange” between Perls’s insights into both the role of perceptual experience and the contact boundary as a place of co-created experience—“corroborated by recent studies in the field of neuroscience”—and addictive experience. Based on this premise, the author looks at addiction as a “‘persistent traumatic experience’ impacting the physiology of figure-ground dynamics and significantly changing the relationship between organism and environment,” and he proposes Gestalt therapy as “a possible bridge between the neurobiological view of the addictive process and phenomenology of care for this specific affliction.”

In “Towards a Notion of Resistance in Gestalt Therapy,” Carmen Vázquez Bandín begins by differentiating the ways in which the concept is used in traditional psychoanalytic thinking and cognitive-behavioral therapy from the approach of Gestalt therapy. Then, drawing heavily on Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman’s (1951) “foundational text,” she presents a Gestalt perspective, which appreciates resistance as a “creative force” rather than seeing it problematically as an “uncreative stuckness,” as Joseph Melnick puts it in his
commentary on the article. Drawing on Vázquez Bandín’s classification of her article as “a primera aproximación, an initial reflection,” Melnick proceeds in his rejoinder to offer what he imagines would be “Part II” of her discussion of resistance. He goes beyond Vázquez Bandín’s description of resistance as occurring primarily in individual development and psychotherapy, given that, he points out, the Gestalt approach has evolved beyond the therapist/client dyad to include couples, families, groups, teams, subsystems, organizations, and cultures. If Vázquez Bandín briefly describes resistance as a relational concept, Melnick cites recent research—newer beginnings—to underscore that resistance “not only occurs within individuals but also to intimate partners, colleagues, teams, groups, families, etc.”

Alan Meara’s review essay on Integrative Gestalt Practice: Transforming Our Ways of Working with People by Mikael Sonne and Jan Toennesvang tells us that the book’s framework is based on Ken Wilbur’s integral-holistic work and is often illustrated by a four-quadrant diagram that must be continually grasped by the reader. Significantly, the authors use the term “practitioner” rather than “therapist” to indicate that their approach encompasses not only the clinical therapy situation but also supervision, coaching, education, and organizational work. “Integrative” is meant to provide a framework that can “integrate” other theoretical approaches into Gestalt, as did Gestalt itself under the influence of Fritz and Laura Perls. The authors present many core Gestalt theoretical concepts, mostly grounded in Perls, Hefferline, Goodman (1951) and Gestalt psychology; and to Wilber’s work, they add many perspectives from other forms of psychotherapy, organizational psychology, and neuroscience. While acknowledging “the evident amount of thought and degree of work involved in creating this contribution to Gestalt practice,” Meara nevertheless cautions that “this is not a book for beginners interested in Gestalt practice.”

Two critical appraisals of Towards a Research Tradition in Gestalt Therapy, edited by Jan Roubal et al., are included in this issue of Gestalt Review. The reviewers, Charles Bowman and Mark Reck, have similar responses to the book: on the one hand, it is an “incredible accomplishment in supporting and furthering the Gestalt research movement” (Reck); and, on the other, it is an “important foundational step toward the ultimate goal set forth by the editorial team, that of enriching the larger field of psychotherapy research through Gestalt therapists’ contact and engagement” (Bowman).

Michael C. Fisher’s review of Nancy Amendt-Lyon’s edited collection of Laura Perls’s previously unpublished notes and literary texts between 1946 and 1985, aptly entitled Timeless Experiences, rounds off this number of the journal. Fisher underscores the value of both content and form: “access to an inner world of poems and problems, efforts to grasp and desires to see”; and
“the rawness of L. Perls’s voice as a writer—unconstrained by set form, yet also frustrated by her pursuit of completion.” Amendt-Lyon’s introduction, which tells the “long story” of how she acquired all the papers and then edited them, is also a foray into L. Perls’s biography and Gestalt approach.

In terms of our theme of “Endings—And New Beginnings,” I wish to note that this is my final editorial though I shall continue on as editor in chief of the journal. Once The Pennsylvania State University Press takes over publishing *Gestalt Review* in a new format as of 2018, I shall cease to subject you, our readers, to my observations and predilections. The articles, reflections, review essays, and reviews will stand on their own. The task of writing 28 editorials out of 30 over the past ten years, between 2008 and 2017—many thanks to the late Taylor Stoehr and to Elinor Greenberg, who each penned one—, has been rewarding for me, and my hope is that the experience of reading them has been equally satisfying for each of you.

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**REFERENCES**
