Editorial

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If you’re going to San Francisco,
be sure to wear some flowers in your hair.

While recently attending the second international conference of the Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy in San Francisco, an event occurred—the death of poet Allen Ginsberg—that made me think of the origins of Gestalt therapy and the cultural context out of which it emerged. At the same time, having the opportunity to be with Gestalt practitioners from around the world sparked my curiosity about the Gestalt movement today and the diversity of its cultural ground as framed by country borders. In fact, as we have more and more opportunities to be together, to learn from and know one another, we are becoming a living, changing, worldwide community. Gestalt Review is committed to helping, in some small way, in the creation of this community. This commitment is reflected in format changes in this, our third issue, which will hopefully stimulate debate and dialogue, and perhaps even inspire you, the reader, to engage with us all in the continued evolution of Gestalt therapy.

The Past: Our Sociological Roots

On Saturday, April 5, 1997, in the midst of the conference, Ginsberg, the poet laureate of the Beat Generation and the originator of the term “flower power,” passed away after a brief illness. For many at this gathering of psychotherapists, educators, and organizational consultants, his death cast a deep shadow.

In retrospect, the impact of his death was not surprising, for Ginsberg held many of the same philosophical, social, and political values and concerns as did the founders of the Gestalt therapy movement. Both

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San Francisco, written by John and Michelle Phillips, recorded on the Ode label by Scott McKenzie, spent 10 weeks on the Billboard top 100 and peaked at number four on June 10, 1967.
Ginsberg and the originators of Gestalt therapy were leaders of a progressive social zeitgeist that challenged the dominant conservative social order of the 1950s. They believed, instead, in a more liberal, open, inclusive, optimistic, and egalitarian society.

Many who participated in the conference were first drawn to Gestalt therapy because of these beliefs, as well as the powerful, life-altering personal encounters with the founders of the Gestalt approach. To say it simply, Fritz and Laura Perls, Paul Goodman, Isadore From, and the others lived their beliefs and had the capacity to make them come alive in front of your eyes. So did Allen Ginsberg, who in many ways was their kin.

In his heart Ginsberg was a radical optimist like Fritz Perls, with whom he shared the status of counterculture guru. Like Perls, he began as an outspoken outsider, became a counterculture celebrity, and died a mainstream icon. Also, like Perls, he was a man of action who valued creative conflict and the honest expression of differences, no matter what the outcome.

When viewed in a deeper way, however, he was most of all like Paul Goodman, the thinker-poet-social reformer who, like Ginsberg, was unashamedly outspoken about his homosexuality and his antiwar beliefs and was directly involved in the cultural upheaval of the 1960s. Ironically, just as Ginsberg’s popularity was based less on his poetry than on his antiwar, prodrug, sexual freedom stance, Goodman’s influence was less a function of his psychology than of his political and social commentaries (Stoehr, 1993).

At their core, both Ginsberg and Goodman believed that change can occur only at the boundary between the self and the other—between the individual and society—and that ultimately this societal context must be addressed fully.

The Present: Gestalt Around the World

While at the conference I participated in a panel of journal editors entitled “Why Journal Writing?” with Lars Berg, Malcolm Parlett, and Daniel Khomlov of the Nordic, British, and Russian Gestalt journals. The panel was one of a number that had an international flavor. In fact, twenty of the presenters were from countries outside the U.S., as were many of the participants. The panel’s purpose was to describe the status of journal writing in our respective countries, as well as how its purpose and mission are tied to cultural ground.

Because of my almost total ignorance of the status of Gestalt therapy in Russia, I found Khomlov’s presentation informative and fascinating. The Russian Gestalt community, until recently, operated in isolation
from those outside Russia. Much of the training of practitioners was conducted by trainers from other countries, especially France. More recently, Gestalt therapists from Russia have been attending Gestalt conferences and training programs throughout the world. Although they, like many Gestalt therapists from other countries, have translated the classic Gestalt writings into their native tongue, English-speaking Gestaltists are just beginning to gain access to Russian writings. Currently there are over 1000 Gestalt therapists in Russia and there are three Gestalt institutes in Moscow alone. These individuals, supported by their own writings and institutes, attest to the strong roots of Gestalt therapy in Russia.

Our discussion also allowed me an opportunity to think further about the goals of *Gestalt Review*. It is a given that we wish to present high-quality readable material, sampling from the wide range of writings that emanate from our theory. But this statement concerning high quality says little about what we wish our relationship to be with you, the reader. In simple terms, we wish it to be one of engagement and dialogue. We hope to push the edge of Gestalt therapy in order to stimulate and challenge you.

Our organizational goals, consistent with Gestalt theory, inform us that this is only possible through lively creative exchange with our environment, between the self and the other “at the boundary.” Our “systemic self” is ever evolving. It includes, in addition to the writers and reviewers, the readers, editors, advertisers, publisher, printer, producers of ink and paper, postal service, and soon). Like all self-organizing systems, *Gestalt Review* is, above all, an ongoing, ever-changing experiment. I believe that these process goals are in keeping with the writings of the founders of Gestalt therapy.

Our written tradition, as historically sparse as it has been, is replete with unusual attempts at engagement and contact. Examples include *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth* (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, 1951) which challenged the reader to perform a number of awareness experiments; *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim* (Perls, 1969a), which included transcripts of workshop therapy sessions describing a range of powerful, often confrontative techniques of engagement; and *In and Out of the Garbage Pail* (Perls’s 1969b) unfolioed autobiography filled with line drawings and commentary. All three of these highly original and unorthodox books demanded a level of contact and engagement of the reader that went far beyond that of most professional books.

The Future: Dialogue and Change

The third issue of *Gestalt Review* contains a number of format changes, that are experimental in nature and that we hope will stimulate and
engage you, the reader. The first involves the initiation of a Book Review section under Joel Latner, one of our associate editors. To quote from a recent letter to our editorial board outlining his goals: “Our feeling thus far is that we’d like it to be more than books and more than reviews. We’d like it to fulfill the usual purpose of a book review section—to note and discuss the publication of new books in our field—and then some. To mention and discuss books outside Gestalt therapy and outside psychology altogether: in the sciences, the arts, the humanities. And not only books, but movies, theater, exhibitions, concepts; anything that enriches our lives and work as Gestalt therapists.” Latner’s first, brief review is of *Crazy Hope and Finite Experience: Final Essays of Paul Goodman* (Stoehr, 1994), followed by *Homage to Robert Frost* (1996) by the three Nobel poets Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Derek Walcott.

Second, we are initiating a Gestalt Research Reports section under the auspices of Pauline Rose Clance and Ansel Woldt. The purpose is to present experimental research to the reader in an abbreviated form. We are pleased to present Bruce Mills’s “A Psychometric Examination of Gestalt Boundary Disturbances” as the first brief report. A fuller description of this section appears elsewhere in this issue.

Third, we are experimenting with a new interactional format designed to heighten dialogue between writers. Dialogue is a cornerstone of Gestalt therapy strongly influenced by both Rank and Buber (Melnick, 1997) and reflected most recently in the writings of Friedman (1989), Jacobs (1989), and Hycner (1990, 1991). We are pleased to initiate this format by presenting two papers dealing with the topic of shame—Leslie S. Greenberg’s and Sandra C. Paivio’s “Varieties of Shame Experience in Psychotherapy” and “Self and Shame: A Gestalt Approach” by Gordon Wheeler. These articles are followed by commentaries by Reinhard Fuhr and Martina Gremmler-Fuhr (“Shame as a Normal and Sometimes Dysfunctional Experience”) and Robert Resnick (“The ‘Recursive Loop’ of Shame: An Alternate Gestalt Therapy Viewpoint”). These commentaries are then responded to by the original authors.

It seems fitting that we begin this dialogical experiment with the topic of shame, an experience in which dialogue is all but extinguished. Shame is experienced as a state of collapse, of nothingness, of no response, of being invisible. The antidote to shame is found in finding one’s voice and speaking out. As discussed above, Gestalt therapy emerged as a loud voice raised against the repressive societal norms of the 1950s and early 1960s. The founders refused to be shamed, shunned, or silenced. They insisted on speaking out, no matter what the price.

We are pleased to begin this issue with an important paper, “A Gestalt Approach to Culturally Responsive Mental Health Treatment” by Deborah Plummer. She argues convincingly for a broad-based, comprehensive Gestalt therapy that incorporates the cultural field as a signifi-
significant part of the therapeutic relationship. Of equal importance, Plummer presents a model based on the Gestalt principles of here-and-now awareness and the self as change agent, which provides the clinician with both method and tools required for effective multicultural counseling.

I believe that the goals of a journal should be paradoxical in nature, to leave the reader satisfied yet still hungering for more. As Ghent (1992) states, "A paradox must be accepted on its own terms, without resolution, and at the same time, valued as a pointer to a new level of comprehension" (p. 135). Paradox, if presented well, challenges habit and shatters convention. So do good journals, good therapists, and good poets. So did Perls, Goodman, and, of course, Allen Ginsberg.

References

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