

Editorial

JOSEPH MELNICK, Ph.D.

Our First Year

AMONG THE MANY STEREOTYPES applied to our Gestalt approach is that we focus exclusively on the present while minimizing the impact of the past and future (see Polster, 1985 or Yontef, 1988). As with every stereotype, it contains a bit of truth. To a large degree, however, this stereotype is false because Gestaltists are very interested in the past and the future. Our interest, however, does not correspond in form to those of some other therapies, because we are not primarily concerned with understanding past causes or predicting future behaviors. Instead, our main interest is in exploring, with the patient, how past and future are configured and enacted in the present.

With this, the fourth issue of 1997, *Gestalt Review* completes its first year. As promised, our agenda has been broad and ambitious—to explore a wide range of contexts, populations, and topics from a contemporary Gestalt therapy perspective. We have not only presented papers reflecting our traditional interest in psychotherapy with the adult individual, but have also published articles dealing with couples, groups, organizations, and cultures. In addition to adults, we have looked at other populations, such as children and the elderly, that require a more specialized perspective. We have presented important topics such as shame, substance abuse and multicultural training, published both brief and full-length research articles, and offered papers originally written in German and Spanish.

Not only have we published a broad range of topics, but we have experimented with different formats. One example is the dialogical format that we used in issue 3, in which writers and respondents interacted around the topic of shame. A second is our ever-evolving and expanding “Book Review” section, which recently outgrew its name and is now called “Reviews, Notes, and Recommendations.”

The content for next year is already taking shape. It will include two translated articles first published in French and German journals, as well

Dr. Melnick, editor of *Gestalt Review*, has been practicing, teaching, and writing about Gestalt therapy for over 25 years.

as a number of original works by non-English-speaking authors. We will present articles on a wide range of topics such as awareness and meaning making, the philosophical roots of Gestalt therapy, spirituality, and self-organizing systems. We are committed to publishing case studies and more from the field of organizational psychology. Last, we are excited to be presenting our first special issue. It will consist of papers from the Second Annual Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy Conference held in San Francisco in April 1997.

Gestalt Review is an ongoing experiment. Our format will continue to change and develop. We will continue to emphasize dialogue and will add occasional interviews with well-known practitioners who have been influenced by the Gestalt approach. We also will be inviting individuals outside the Gestalt therapy community to respond to and comment on articles.

In turning to issue 4, it is filled with a series of excellent articles and reviews. We are pleased to begin this issue with Violet Oaklander's "The Therapeutic Process with Children and Adolescents." Oaklander draws from her many years of practice integrating theory and intervention. She not only brings traditional Gestalt concepts such as contact, resistance, support, and experiment to life, but also focuses on processes such as the strengthening of the child's inner support structure, the utilization of a child's developmental age, helping the child become self-nurturing, and effective termination.

James Doak, in "Mentorship, Roadmaps, and the Impersonal: Cognitive Support for the Therapeutic Process," moves beyond the traditional phenomenological format in which the therapist abstains from strongly influencing the creation of the figure. Doak discusses a "mentoring approach" in dealing with large issues that are not personal in origin. From this perspective, the therapist speaks and interacts more as an expert in which "objective truth approximations" are offered and integrated into therapeutic work. The "owning" by the therapist of objective knowledge and the claiming of expertise is an interesting counterpoint to our philosophical belief in contextually open and negotiated therapeutic boundaries. I hope it will stimulate you to assess where you stand on this important dimension of therapy.

Following Doak's paper is Peter Mullen's "Confluence, Differentiation, Integration: Toward a Gestalt Theory of Couple Development." Mullen presents a clear, cogent model for viewing relationship stages of development. His article may stimulate debate concerning two issues that have historically been very controversial within the Gestalt community: whether our approach can (or should) be applied to populations "beyond the individual" (i.e., couples, families, groups, organizations, etc.) and whether it can (or should be) combined with other approaches and theories. In this article Mullen does both. He applies the Gestalt

approach to couples and integrates it with constructive developmental theory. He presents a convincing argument for integration and expansion.

Gestalt therapy, grounded in a field theory perspective, views culture as giving unique aliveness to therapeutic theory. Marta Fischman Slemenson's "Our Meeting with Gestalt Therapy: Some Reflections on Paul Goodman and the Development of Gestalt Theory in the Americas Derived from *Here Now Next*" presents English-speaking readers with her personal and insightful recollections of the birth and development of Gestalt therapy in South America and, more specifically, Argentina.

In terms of the present, it is alive and thriving (Slemenson, 1997, personal communication). The AGBA (Gestalt Association of Buenos Aires), the first association of its kind in Latin America, was born in 1980; in 1982 it started its own postgraduate school, which has trained over 150 Gestalt therapists. In 1995 AGBA organized its first intentional conference and began publishing a journal, *Enfoque Gestáltico*, which appears every 2 months. In terms of her native Argentina, Slemenson reports that there are three or four "newspapers" and a publishing house, begun in 1996, which are devoted to Gestalt therapy. Over the last few years a dozen original books have been published. In addition, there are several private institutes that are aligned with AGBA.

Prior to concluding our fourth issue with "Reviews, Notes, Recommendations," we present Kevin Prosnick's "A Factor Analytic Study of Transfluence," in which he empirically explores transcendent experience while relating it to Gestalt theory. His questionnaire helps generate important information concerning the relationship between mysticism and resistances.

As we look to the future from the vantage point of the recent past and the more immediate present, we cannot help but conclude that Gestalt therapy is alive and well, continuously self-organizing and developing. We hope that you will choose to support us by renewing your subscription. We also welcome your more active involvement. Consider writing an article or contributing to "Reviews, Notes, Recommendations." Last, we ask you to pass the word. Please tell others both within and outside the Gestalt therapy community about *Gestalt Review*.

References

- Polster, E. (1985), Imprisoned in the present. *Gestalt J.*, 8:5-22.
Yontef, G. (1988), Assimilating diagnostic and psychoanalytic perspectives into Gestalt therapy. *Gestalt J.*, 11:5-32.

17 South Street
Portland, ME 04101