

Novelty, Excitement and Growth

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Foreword to the first Polish edition of the theoretical volume of *Gestalt Therapy* (1951) by Frederick S. Perls, Ralph F. Hefferline and Paul Goodman

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English version

It is with great pleasure that we are now handing over to readers the long-awaited Polish edition of the seminal text of Gestalt psychotherapy, *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. The book in front of you is the first volume of a two-part publication, *Novelty, Excitement and Growth* that contains theoretical part of the founding text first published by Julian Press in New York in 1951. Polish edition of the second volume, *Mobilising the Self*, which is a practical part of the original publication and comprises of a series of exercises designed by the book's authors to expand awareness together with a detailed commentary, is currently in preparation and will be published shortly by the same publishing house – Oficyna Związek Otwarty (OZO); <https://oficynazwiazekotwarty.pl/>.

This first edition of *Gestalt Therapy* in the Polish language has given us the opportunity to publish the two volumes separately, thus offering a publication smaller in size – the book that is not only easier to hold in hand, but also more accessible to read, as it restores the original editorial structure agreed by its authors: Volume I – theory and Volume II – practice, which, strictly for commercial reasons, was reversed by the first publisher. More details about this, as well as the fascinating history and process behind writing this work, including profiles of all three authors, Frederick S. Perls, Ralph F. Hefferline and Paul Goodman, after whom it is popularly known as 'PHG', can be found in the *Introduction* to the first edition, written by the

authors themselves, and in the *Introduction to the 1994 Gestalt Journal Press Edition* written by Isadore From and Michael V. Miller, which open the current volume. The present edition contains also a reprint of the *Afterword* written by Taylor Stoehr to the French edition of *Gestalt-Thérapie* (L'exprimerie, 2001), which introduces the reader to Paul Goodman – an American writer, poet, philosopher and social critic widely regarded as a ghost-writer of the theoretical part of PHG, who continues to remain little-known in Poland.

'This book is a theory and practice of Gestalt-Therapy, the science and technique of figure/background forming in the organism/environment field' (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, 1951, Chapter II, 12, p. 250)

The above remarkably succinct summary of the book contained in the introduction to its theoretical volume is rather incomprehensible to many until they choose to fully engage with the text. Even then, however, a number of formulations may remain obscure, for one thing is certain: the authors' aim was not to simplify the complex nature of reality, but rather to provide readers with the appropriate tools for orientating themselves better in the world they live. In the authors' words, 'if the theory is often confusing and ambiguous, it may be that the nature too is confusing and ambiguous' (ibid., Chapter VI, 8, p. 315). But if you give yourself the chance to come into a closer contact with this text, the theory itself will already begin to work in you.

Gestalt therapy teaches us how to make full use of senses involved in the constant exchange between ourselves and the environment, so that we can take responsibility for our own choices and develop the capacity to support ourselves in this process. The key to achieving this is to become aware of the process of raising awareness, which can be learned when one follows the inherent excitement of one's own concern, needs and interest.

This is what the authors mean when they say that ‘psychology studies the operation of the contact-boundary in the organism/environment field’ (ibid., Chapter I, 3, p. 229). But for this to happen, as the eminent Polish psychiatrist and humanist Antoni Kępiński (1977) once said, ‘a person has to have the courage to embark on such a difficult journey as the very close and personal learning about human nature’ (p. 28) by entering into direct, engaged, aware contact with the world one lives in, day-to-day, moment-to-moment.

Unfortunately, perhaps precisely because of the fact that this truly revolutionary volume of applied phenomenology is written in such ‘dense’ language requiring maximum focus, despite the passage of time and many efforts to popularise it, Gestalt therapy theory remains little known, especially when we compare it with some more conventionally and simply described concepts of psychotherapy. Still, they lack the same almost childlike curiosity and unbridled enthusiasm for discovering and creating new meanings that characterise the Gestalt therapy foundational text. For this reason, because *Novelty, Excitement and Growth* is largely a record, as if taken ‘in the heat of the moment’, of a spontaneous process of just-composed novel theory, it is not fully processed, often vague or ambiguous, but at the same time fresh and supremely stimulating. The concentrated engaged reader becomes a witness and soon also a participant in an extremely interesting process – the creation and simultaneous execution of a work at the same time! In particular, the first eleven chapters are like a deliberately underscored indeterminate score of a John Cage composition, or other works of contemporary art, where the breakdown of form allows for the discovery and creation of new unexpected integrations, thus assuming the uniqueness of the performance itself and space for the improvisation by its executor and the audience.

At the same time, the theory presented here is a highly advanced, well-thought-out and thorough philosophical and historical-social discourse based on the findings of psychoanalysis, which do both, offers an extremely sharp and daring evaluation of the Freudian method and

continues to advance it. A large part of the book is taken up by a detailed critique of orthodox psychoanalysis as focusing too much on the recovery of childhood trauma and, simultaneously, being unable to address effectively unfinished situations that are manifested, as a rule, in every present behaviour. Simultaneously, the authors are careful to select some of the more radical strands of the Freudian view, subject them to in-depth analysis and systematically assimilate them into holistic, progressive and integrated psychology, where such psychoanalytic concepts like, for example, the reality principle, id, ego and self are brought back to life again, but already in a completely novel form, which is well applicable in contemporary psychotherapy. Nothing is wasted; everything is recycled in a truly innovative way.

Novelty, Excitement and Growth contains also a constructive critique of the academic field of research popular in the 1920s and 1930s, the so-called Berlin School of Gestalt Psychology, which the authors argue having focused almost exclusively on the study of perceptual phenomena neglect other, much more practical aspects of human life, including the whole sphere of interpersonal relationships, feelings and emotions. Nevertheless, the achievements of this outstanding school of psychology, just as in the case of psychoanalysis, are by no means ignored or underestimated by the ‘finders’ of Gestalt therapy, as they chose to call themselves. On the contrary, in their hands, the two branches of knowledge form a kind of crucible allowing the most radical insights and threads of both psychological theories to emerge, which are then effectively developed by the authors, while integrating further elements. These are drawn from such widely divergent fields as John Smuts’ holism and functional anthropology, Aristotle’s and Kant’s philosophy and the ideas of the pragmatists and Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue, as well as social history and poetry, Zen philosophy (but, as Goodman emphasised, ‘along with more than just the aesthetic surface, so also the body and the social sphere’; Stoehr, 1993), existentialism (‘but the practical kind and based on ordinary situations’; *ibid.*), and broadly defined anarchism, theatre and Alfred

Korzybski's general semantics; Kurt Lewin's field theory and action-oriented psychology; and the concepts of Freudian revisionists such as Otto Rank, Harry Stuck Sullivan and Karen Horney or Wilhelm Reich's views on the continuity of the individual, society, politics and sexuality, to name some of the most obvious inspirations. In this way, the authors achieved a unique synthesis of the most diverse earlier philosophical and psychological theories together with the cultural and intellectual trends of the 1940s and 1950s into a new *gestalt*, and so the work they carved presented to the world for the first time a coherent narrative of the then still emerging ground-breaking theory behind the now completely new psychotherapy, which, under the name of Gestalt Therapy, is now practised all over the world, including Poland for many years.

It is not surprising, therefore, that among such revealing and significant ideas, such as the location of experience at the contact-boundary of the individual and environment, the innovative definition of the notion of contact and of the conscious and the unconscious, the emphasis on the importance of polarities and the so-called 'creative indifference', organismic self-regulation and its creative adjustments, or the introduction of the revolutionary concept of the self as a truly processual and temporal concept, *selfing* – a process in motion, the book also contains many ambiguities or contradictions, and at times indeed extremely blatant, prejudicial opinions (e.g., in relation to women or people of different orientation than heterosexual) – views that are surprisingly stereotypical and inaccurate, and are indicative of the age of this text. Despite devoting a large part of the book to discussing social processes, there is a glaring lack of reference to such common social phenomena as racism, chauvinism and misogyny or homophobia. However, this at least in part seems to be related to the changes in awareness of social perception and legal recognition of differences between people that have taken place over the last 70 years in the wake of various antidiscrimination and human rights movements. Indeed, it should be remembered that *Gestalt Therapy* was written even before the sexual

revolution of the 1960s in the United States, which initiated these changes. Nevertheless, much of the founding text remains as relevant today as it was in 1951. PHG remains the firm basis for the training of a whole host of Gestalt psychotherapy and counselling students today, and continues to be an inexhaustible resource for many experienced practitioners as an extraordinarily meticulous interpretation of the basic philosophical views that distinguish Gestalt therapy from other approaches to psychotherapy as a thoroughly holistic, phenomenological, relational and experimental approach; a truly humanistic integrative method of psychotherapy. Over the decades, the hypotheses and views on the nature of human beings and their issues presented in this book have had a profound influence on the development of psychological theory as a whole, and in particular its humanistic-existential strand known as the 'third force' psychology.

Perhaps the most ground-breaking aspect of this work lies in the authors' emphasis on the existence of continuous mutual interdependencies or relations between the individual and the environment, the person and other people, the society and its institutions, in general, and between the client and the therapist in particular.

Just as the individual and the environment are not at all separate entities, but form together a functioning, mutually influencing, holistic system, so too, in the therapy room, client and therapist mutually shape each other, while fully attentive, aware participation in this process of co-creation is at the heart of the therapeutic situation in Gestalt therapy.

As Malcolm Parlett – British psychotherapist, founder and first editor-in-chief of the *British Gestalt Journal* once highlighted, 'the original intention of Gestalt therapy was to locate human suffering not so much within a person's individual psychopathology, but in the reciprocal relationships between people and their situations' (Clarkson and McKewn, 1993, p. 193). To this day, this represents a remarkably novel view of human nature, personality and behaviour,

both in health and illness, together with a completely unprecedented approach to the process of healing in psychotherapy. The radicalism of the theory contained in this book lies primarily in the fact that it applies equally to the individual and the world around them; hence Gestalt therapy represents equally an approach to psychotherapy as it is to sociology; it is a kind of ecological discipline and is thoroughly political in nature.

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The same passionate non-conformist character that characterises the theory behind Gestalt therapy described in the volume *Novelty, Excitement and Growth*, which is equally committed to the development of autonomy and personal identity, while at the same time emphasising the power of collective action to bring about fundamental changes in social and political life, I still vividly remember from my time as a psychology student at the University of Warsaw, in the early 1980s. In retrospect, I think that I witnessed then the realisation of just such a belief in the power of close connection between actions for the benefit of the individual and, at the same time, the social good, which characterised the mass democratic and self-governing movement that led to the creation of *Solidarity* and, ultimately, to the overthrow of communist regime and the regaining of political sovereignty in Poland.

I remember from that period how valuable it was for the students to read the writings emerging from the ideas of representatives of ‘third force’ psychology, including the ‘finders’ of Gestalt therapy. I have already written previously in the *British Gestalt Journal* (2015) that, for me personally at that time, the most revolutionary idea was the stance taken by Gestalt therapy towards the concept of aggression.

‘Aggression not only is a destructive energy, but the force which is behind all our activities without which we could not do anything. Aggression not only makes us attack, it also makes us tackle things; it does not only destroy, it also builds up; it not only makes

us steal and rob, it also lies behind our endeavours to take hold and master what we have a right to. [...] Since aggression is indispensable ingredient of human makeup, we have to use it, to develop it into a valuable instrument for the management of our lives.’ (Laura Perls, 1992, pp. 42-43).

This essential insight enabling the recognition of the positive, creative nature of so-called ‘dental aggression’, together with the radical call to expose, ‘figure out’ and ‘spit out’ parental, social and political introjects, which constituted the main theoretical difference between Gestalt therapy and the traditional psychoanalytic outlook, present in the very kernel of Gestalt therapy theory as early as the mid-1930s, to which, in PHG, the Chapter VIII is devoted to, during the anti-government protests and martial law in Poland in the 1980s, had a huge impact on the imagination and behaviour of young people like me. It had quite literally given us back the use of our teeth!

As I recall my journey from the moment of my first encounter with PHG to the present day, when together with a select team of translators, editors and the OZO publishing house we have finally succeeded in producing this first Polish language edition of *Gestalt Therapy*, another book comes to mind that has accompanied me for most of my life – *The Little Prince*. I received it along with a money saving book for my first birthday from my grandparents, who, in addition to practical support, sought also to nurture their grandson’s spiritual growth. I make no secret of the fact that it took me quite a while to fully appreciate their gift; I owe the advantage of holding the savings, as well as discovering the guiding message of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s (1943/1961) philosophical fable that ‘it is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye” (p. 62), in the equal measure to the complexities of my own life, from which my grandparents fortunately failed to protect me. Despite having *The Little Prince* read to me by my parents, I wasn’t initially fond of the book – it contained too little action to absorb me in its story; moreover, its enigmatic ending was making me feel

extremely sad. Then again, I have always enjoyed the beautiful illustrations by its author that it contained. It was a compulsory reading at primary school that put me off reading it altogether. I remember returning to *Le Petit Prince* only much later, in its original version, during French lessons in my high school years, but apparently, I was still too young to fully realise its timeless significance. It wasn't until after I left my family's nest, during my university studies, when by struggling on my own with some uncertainties and turbulence of my personal life that I noticed what a wonderful companion it was. Since then, it has become a source of further discovery and, rather unexpectedly, I have found constant solace in this book, whether I read it in Polish or in original French.

The story of my relationship with *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* is somewhat similar. I first heard of its existence when I was still a psychology undergraduate in the early 1980s. I remember that, being interested in the contribution of Gestalt psychology to the process of neuropsychological rehabilitation of people following brain injury, a member of the university lab directed my attention to the organismic approach to working with aphasia affected patients represented by Kurt Goldstein, who treated neurological symptoms as part of the whole organism, including the personality and biology of the person as well as their current situation. So far, I had been under the impression of a rather fragmented and mechanistic approach to both patients with brain injury and psychiatric disorders. Seeing my curiosity, he informed me of the development in the West of a new outlook on human nature, not only in the case of illness but also in health, called Gestalt therapy.

The copy of Perls, Hefferline and Goodman's volume that I ordered from the US at the time never arrived, but I remember my excitement when I unexpectedly discovered some of its passages quoted in James Kepner's book *Body Process: A Gestalt Approach to Working with the Body in Psychotherapy*, published in Polish in 1987. It seems that out of the whole

publication, it was these brief quotations that made the biggest impact on me. I still remember, for example, the author's reference to PHG's stimulating definition of psychological health and illness:

'The description of psychological health and disease is a simple one. It is a matter of identification and alienation of the self: if a man identifies with his forming self, does not inhibit his own creative excitement and reaching towards the coming solution; and, conversely, if, he alienates what is not organically his own and therefore cannot be of vital interest, but rather disrupts the figure/background, then he is psychologically healthy, for he is exercising his best power and will do the best he can in the difficult circumstances of the world. But on the contrary, if he alienates himself and, because of false identifications, tries to conquer his own spontaneity, he then creates his life dull, confused and painful' (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, 1951, Chapter I, 11, pp. 235).

Just as well, I recall that it offered a radically new understanding of resistance in Gestalt therapy:

'in the usual character-analysis, the resistances are "attacked", "defences" are dissolved, and so forth. But on the contrary, if the awareness is creative, then these very resistances and defences – they are really counter-attacks and aggressions against the self – are taken as active expressions of vitality, however neurotic they may be in the total picture' (ibid., Chapter II, 12, p. 248).

It is hard not to see how revolutionary these formulations were at the time, but isn't still the case? Not long after I left Poland and settled permanently in the UK, *Gestalt Therapy* was one of the first books I bought here; it seems that it was in the course of my trying to decipher its intricate meanings that I finally began to become fluent in English.

This is by no means to say that I had no difficulty reading this book. On the contrary, it took me as many years to thoroughly acquaint myself with both volumes as it did to work later on its Polish translation, which I only began in earnest in 2014, encouraged among others by Ewa Canert-Ląka and Anna Bal whom I met at the Research Conference of the Polish Society for Gestalt Psychotherapy (PTPG) in Wrocław. It was then when I learned, for the first time, that hardly anyone in Poland had ever heard of PHG, which motivated me to make this key text available to Polish psychotherapists, not only for its historical significance, but mostly for having discovered personally its deeply humanistic message; not to mention the theoretical wisdom that it contains, which has formed the basis for the clinical practice of Gestalt therapy.

It is well known that the theoretical part is written in extremely convoluted language, but as soon as one engages with its text fully, giving oneself the time and space to thoroughly ‘chew’ on the book’s content, something truly magical happens: on the basis of its theory, the reader reaches into their own reserves of therapeutic competence, begins to think and act quite freely, drawing on their own unique experience, doing therapy with their whole self, where the direction is given by therapist’s relationship with the client and the task at hand. As Dan Bloom (2004) – former president of New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy (NYIGT) once wrote, our clinical work is an integrated, knowledge-based intuition, which reading PHG wonderfully fosters.

But one glance at the pages of this book is not enough to make this happen. I have come to realise it from my own experience. *Gestalt Therapy* is best read with others, in a group, where there is not only the opportunity to become thoroughly acquainted with the theory presented in this book, but when one has, above all, the opportunity to engage fully with others in dialogue about the complex concepts of Gestalt therapy theory, in a mutual exchange of different ways of their intellectual understanding and emotionally reacting to them, with the reference to one’s own clinical practice and personal life experiences; and to carry out together

the awareness exercises contained in the practical part of the book. Such a fully informed process of bringing theory and practice into contact through reading PHG in a group – line by line, was the basis of my training as a psychotherapist in the UK. More importantly, my training emphasised at every turn the importance of students taking an active, often inquisitive and critical attitude towards the theories that were taught and the writings we were given to read, including this very text. This is because the use of ‘dental aggression’ frees independent thinking, allows us to make discoveries and create new meanings based already on our own unique life experience, including the development of our own unique style as a therapist. In this way, through the mobilisation of one’s own resources, including individual’s independent capacity to think, deconstruct and create anew, time after time, I had witnessed the exceptional transformations of students into mature, competent practitioners, including my own, without which the translation of *Gestalt Therapy* into Polish would inevitably have failed.

Here I must emphasize the important contribution of people without whose participation this would not have been possible: my tutors and colleagues at the Gestalt Centre London, with whom I studied and tirelessly ‘chewed’ through concepts contained within theoretical volume of PHG, amongst them Michael Ellis, Jon Blend, Anne Cole, Barbara Stones, Carol Siederer, Toni Gilligan, my supervisors: Peggy Sherno, Gaie Houston and Jane Puddy, and the full of expertise, knowledge and enthusiasm Gestalt practitioners with whom I share deep friendship, in particular Vivienne Barnett, Gayla Feinstein, Nickei Falconer, and Susan Gregory, whose unwavering belief in me and the success of this project, together with their support over many years, cannot be exaggerated. Sincere thanks also to Jean-Marie Robin, Carmen Vázquez Bandín and Michael Vincent Miller for their advice and for allowing us to borrow from their publications. Finally, I also need to emphasise the important role played in this process by my life partner and husband, Biman Nandi, whose quiet, patient attentive presence in my life made it possible for me to undertake such an ambitious and time-consuming task at all.

In addition, I would like to mention two more people without whom this whole project would simply never have happened. The first is my trainer-mentor, Carl Hodges, whom I met at the very beginning of my adventure with Gestalt therapy, and whose authentic and humanistic approach to psychotherapy and education I had the opportunity to be exposed to for almost twenty years. This eminent American Gestalt therapist, the second president of NYIGT, who took over from Laura Perls and was also the second president of the AAGT (Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy, presently IAAGT), was for many years closely associated with the Gestalt Centre London, where he regularly led workshops and groups and also later offered supervision. It was Carl who never parted with his already much-worn copy of the first edition of PHG, held together only by adhesive tape, with copious amounts of scribbled notes sticking out of it. I remember when, while we were still students, we sometimes made fun of his palpable fascination with this book, struggling to get through it ourselves. At the same time, deep down I felt I simply envied him; envied his passion, his knowledge, and his skills. During Carl's classes, one could expect that sooner or later he would undoubtedly refer to what had been written on a specific subject in PHG, not at all to be required to take it in its entirety, but instead to offer a basis for further discussion, a springboard and a necessary catalyst that inevitably triggered new insights, revisions of concepts, our novel ideas – 'variations on the same theme'. His classes were exciting, unlocked independent thinking, supported intuition.

Carl had a keen interest in field theory and its practical application to groups, organisations and, more generally, in society at large and within diverse settings in particular, to better understand and deal with social phenomena that tend to be polarised on the basis of racial, political or class differences, as well as institutions that hinder the realisation of human potential. As an African-American, Carl helped me to better understand a Gestalt perspective on relationality and working with issues of difference, diversity and inclusion that was unlike

I had known before. He talked about ‘man-ing’ and ‘race-ing’ rather than people being male or being black or white. In this way, he emphasized a very Gestalt therapy concept that everything, including human beings, is constantly changing, moving; everything is in process.

‘The implications of this choice of language are firstly, that people are not defined by only one aspect of their behaviour or experience and, secondly, that, change is possible. How we choose to define depends on the perspective and philosophy of the one who defines, and often depends on whether the one who defines has social and political power. Labelling is always a political act’ (Carl Hodges, personal communication).

I will never forget Carl addressing me one day, ‘You are an event, Piotr’, which had a profound effect on me – for since that moment on I have no longer felt as being something fixed, but instead a living process that is constantly becoming.

Carl saw himself and his role as a facilitator of an individual’s commitment to a better functioning society. I had the impression that he continued to teach and work in the vein of Paul Goodman – most certainly the leading author of the theoretical part of *Gestalt Therapy*, who was driven by a genuine belief that creating a good enough community, which embraces and supports the differences of all its individual members is possible and beneficial to overall health and well-being. It was Goodman – an avid anarchist social and political thinker, known in his day as ‘the philosopher of the New Left’, who only two years before his death, stated:

‘For green grass and clean rivers, children with bright eyes and good color, and people safe from being pushed around – for a few things like these, I find I am pretty ready to think away most other political, economic, and technological advantages’ (Goodman, 1970, p. 181).

The second person I want to mention here is Ewa Canert-Łąka, whom I met while at the PTPG Conference in Poland in 2014. We were supposed to write this *Foreword* to the Polish edition together, but unfortunately an unexpected change of circumstances in her life hindered our earlier plans. Ewa is a psychotherapist and experienced trainer-teacher of Gestalt therapy. The founder and director of the Institute of Gestalt Training and Education (ITEG) in Rzeszów, Ewa was also one of the founders and the first President of the PTPG and co-founder of the psychotherapy association forum of the Polish Council for Psychotherapy and has worked for many years for the development of Gestalt therapy in Poland. It was thanks to her enthusiasm and initiative that the 11th Conference of the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT) was held in Kraków in 2013. The commencement of closer relations between Poland and the international community of Gestalt therapists was a huge achievement at the time, which resulted in the development of the ongoing exchange of experience and practice in the field of psychotherapy, enhancement of clinical skills and rising the training standards of Gestalt practitioners in Poland.

The dialogue about the varied field of Gestalt therapy across the world, the differences and similarities between its clinical practice and training in Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States became the beginning of our acquaintance. Ewa frequently talked about how much she missed the theoretical grounding of her therapeutic practice without having access to a Polish translation of the seminal text of Gestalt therapy. ‘We collected knowledge from individual books that arrived from beyond the Iron Curtain in the 1980s or were published in Polish, but they were few and far between and not the most important ones. We painstakingly created a mosaic consisting of articles in English downloaded from the Internet, which only referred to the founding text, but which often represented the author’s individual point of view, extended by his personal non-Gestalt inspirations. [...] I missed the opportunity to taste, bite and chew on the philosophy and theory that underlies Gestalt therapy. It is impossible to digest,

understand, and assimilate the last 70 years of development of the Gestalt approach to psychotherapy without a thorough acquaintance with its theoretical assumptions. Learning thoroughly about PHG was revealing and grounding for me. Going back to the roots proved to be very much a growth inducing experience' (Canert-Łąka, 2015).

My meeting with Ewa eight years ago initiated our collaboration to spread the theoretical foundations of Gestalt therapy in Poland. We started with a short experiential-supervision workshop, and then developed a year-long series of seminars and workshops for psychotherapists based on a joint reading of PHG, and included theoretical discussions, searching together for understanding, making meanings, and finding ourselves and our resources of being Gestalt therapists. I remember this period as one of the most exciting in my professional life, because it was a time that offered the opportunity of often very intimate meetings with Polish psychotherapists together with a thorough dialogue on the subject of Gestalt theory and practice – what we all had in common with each other and took a keen interest in. The initiative and organisation of these workshops fell at first exclusively to Ewa, as did the fact that I eventually undertook the translation of PHG into Polish. Ewa, for your boundless curiosity and for your determined 'push' to get me going on translating this key text into Polish, I am immensely grateful to you! Our collaboration continues, but now as part of a whole team that was formed specifically for the delivering of the final version of the book.

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It is well known that behind the names of the three authors mentioned on the cover of PHG there is a much larger group of people who, together with them, developed theoretical foundations of Gestalt therapy described in this volume. One of these people was the wife of Frederick Perls, Laura, about whom Paul Goodman said was the first psychoanalyst to sit face-to-face with her clients. She was the originator of the concept of dental aggression. She devised

it on the basis of observations of development of her own first child's, Renate, during the teething period and her transition from breastfeeding to solid foods. The concept was the basis of the Frederick Perls' paper on oral resistances presented in 1936 at the XIV Congress of the International Psycho-Analytical Association in Marienbad and later formed the basis for his first book, *Ego, Hunger and Aggression*, to which Laura wrote as many as two chapters, but the account of her important contribution survives only in the preface to the first two editions.

Alongside her, the background consisted of a number of others who formed the first training group run by Frederick and Laura Perls, called, not insignificantly, the 'working group', because the theoretical and practical foundations of Gestalt therapy were formed on the basis of observations and analysis of this very group process and the insights of its members, most of whom had a good knowledge of psychoanalysis. In addition to Laura and Frederick Perls, and Paul Goodman, the group that formed in late 1948 in New York included: Elliott Shapiro (a pioneer of community-run schools), Paul Weisz (a physician who became a therapist and later a Zen adept), Isadore From (one of the Perls' first American patients, a fierce supporter of gay men, renowned for his attention to detail in language and practice, who developed a Gestalt therapy training based on close reading of foundational text used in NYIGT and other training centres in the West), Ralph Hefferline (a university professor, who shortly after completing his work on the practical part of *Gestalt Therapy* joined the behaviourist school of psychology), Jim Simkin (the first Gestalt therapist with a doctorate, who later worked with Fritz on the west coast of the USA), Patrick Kelley (therapist involved in working with members of New York street gangs and founder of 'Identity House' – the first therapeutic centre for the LGBT community), Magda Denes (Budapest-born psychoanalyst, therapist and writer), Richard Kitzler (an outstanding historian and philosophy teacher), and psychiatrists associated with Bellevue Hospital: Allison Montague, Buck Eastman, Lotte Weisz and a few others. The group met weekly.

What united them were humanist ideals and values such as freedom, personal autonomy, choice, self-realisation, and similar radical socio-political views; they all unanimously argued against an archaic, paternalistic system of power that interfered with personal relationships and imposed on people the way they should lead their lives. They were also intensely committed to the transformation and further development of psychoanalytic theory. On the one hand, psychoanalysis formed the basis of their experience and knowledge; on the other, they saw in it radical themes that Freud, for various reasons, had overlooked. Being interested in many new ideas, they wanted to integrate them into their therapeutic practice, but also to take them beyond the psychologist's office, using them in education, in their work with various groups and communities, in theatre and in politics. Their unique individual contributions shaped the final figure of the radically new theory of Gestalt therapy; they all form the background to PHG.

As with the original text of *Gestalt Therapy*, the Polish edition is not the work of a single author, but the result of the work of a whole team. About three years ago, Ewa Canert-Łąka and I concluded that it would not be possible to realise our desire to publish PHG in Poland without the help of additional people. My version of the translation was satisfactory for personal use, but not precise enough to be published. I am not a linguist or researcher, I love reading, working with clients and teaching Gestalt therapy; I write mainly for myself and have definitely never done anything resembling a proper translation. I have also always been enthusiastic about *Novelty, Excitement and Growth* and so my version focused on conveying the spirit of this part of PHG. In my desire to capture Paul Goodman's writing craft and style, I became intimately acquainted with the most of literary legacy of this writer and poet, and I also sought to get to know him better as a person; I talked and read interviews with people who had met him or who were his students. My emphasis on the person of the author and his creative process meant that what suffered was the lucidity of the theoretical content of the translation

itself. My first version of translation highlighted the direct language Goodman used, as it were, entering into a dialogue with the reader, using stylistic devices such as personification and anthropomorphisms of abstract concepts, resorting at times to sarcasm when he critiqued psychological theories, which he disagreed with, but also using lyricism, in particular when describing the nature of the processual self. As a result, my version was quite dramatic, but it also contained a lot of ambiguity, interpretation and plenty of neologisms and linguistic errors. The text required a thorough check for consistency with the original and a detailed grammatical and stylistic revision, not to mention the serious business of negotiating with a publisher.

We then established cooperation with Dr Mariola Paruzel-Czachura and Bartosz Konieczniak, who translated to Polish Frederick Perls' *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim* (1969/2019). It was important for the success of our project that being keenly interested in Gestalt therapy and at the same time involved in academic work at the Psychology Department of the University of Silesia, Mariola and Bartosz were both clear thinkers and had previous experience of the publishing process. When we also found out that they had already begun working on the translation of the practical part of PHG, we decided to join our forces and have been moving things forward together ever since. Shortly afterwards, we were also joined by Justyna Sienkiewicz-Urbaniak, a Gestalt psychotherapist, whose knowledge of philosophy and particular attentiveness and feel for the use of language were indispensable in finding satisfactory solutions in the translation of this complex theoretical text.

Our aim as a team became to adhere as closely as possible to the original, while at the same time producing a text that would be clearly readable in Polish. At the same time, we chose not to simplify anything, but to retain the original ambiguities and contradictions, as this is already the nature of this book. It was also a joint decision of the team to use the term 'sensory awareness' (pol. świadomość doznaniowa), which is an equivalent to the term 'awareness' in its true Gestalt sense, and to maintain a direct translation into Polish of German psychoanalytic

terms such as ‘das Ich’ (the I), ‘das Es’ (the It), and ‘das Über-Ich’ (the Over-I or the I Above), but at the same time to write the names of these terms with a lower-case letter, in order to prevent their reification (turning their abstract character into a concrete one), as recommended by the authors of *Gestalt Therapy*. In any case, the most important thing was for us to ensure that we made a credible translation, so that the flaws in the translation did not exacerbate the difficulties associated with the intricacy of the text itself.

In order to support the reader we have also opted to include a bibliography and additional materials that offer a background, so to speak, to the figure that is the PHG text itself, and to provide the reader with extensive endnotes. Some are highly sceptical of this translation technique and argue that ‘an annotation is a humiliation for the translator’. In such optics, to add an endnote is to admit defeat (Sztorc, 2016, p. 122). We, however, argue that they are valuable because they help to overcome the linguistic, or more broadly, cultural gap, as they draw attention to discrepancies between the original version and the translation, provide information on translation choices and on the source text and its authors. This is all the more important because each member of the translation team interacted with the original text in their own way, in the light of their previous experience, personal and professional, which led to many conversations between us before the final translation of some of its passages was agreed upon, and which also resulted in a large proportion of these very footnotes. We think, therefore, that the endnotes offer readers a glimpse behind the scenes of the translation process as it were. At this point I would like to thank Aleksandra Małek, the editor, as well as Anna Bal and Katarzyna Kurska-Wilk from the OZO publishing house for their kind cooperation and assistance when working on the final shape of this publication.

Just to conclude, it is worth mentioning the concept of the so-called death of the author, which at the same time marks the birth of the translator. ‘Moving away from the ideal of a single, “theological” meaning of a text in accordance with the author’s intention opens the way

to an infinite number of re-/readings. There is no longer a single, fixed sense to which the translator should be faithful, and each reading produces new interpretations. Hence, there can also be no final shape to the translation – it is necessarily a constant work in progress’ (Sztorc, 2016, p. 129). In the present moment, on the other hand, this process continues when the book is already in the hands of readers. So this moment now marks the symbolic death of the translator and, at the same time, the birth of the reader, who will already be rediscovering and creating the meanings contained in it. This is the same process that the authors themselves pointed out already in the *Introduction* to the first edition:

‘Indispensable – both for the writing and the thorough understanding of this book – is an attitude which as a theory actually permeates the content and method of the book. Thus the reader is apparently confronted with the impossible task: to understand the book he must have the “Gestaltist” mentality, and to acquire it he must understand the book. Fortunately, the difficulty is far from being insurmountable, for the authors have not invented such a mentality. On the contrary, we believe that the Gestalt outlook is the original, undistorted, natural approach to life, that is, to man’s thinking, acting, feeling.’
(Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951, viii)

* * *

The original 1951 theory presented in the book *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* by F.S. Perls, R.F. Hefferline and P. Goodman has served us well. It has been central to Gestalt therapy for over 70 years. The theory described in the volume *Novelty, Excitement and Growth* is currently the subject of much discussion, comparisons and juxtaposition with other more recent concepts, such as contact intentionality, the aesthetic criterion, relationality in the therapeutic situation and field epistemologies. In order to fully appreciate the ongoing dialogue between theorists of contemporary Gestalt therapy, a thorough

knowledge of the PHG text, its model and its assumptions is essential. Likewise, it is necessary to apply these new perspectives in everyday clinical work. We very much hope that providing the Polish reader with a translation of this important work will increase interest in Gestalt therapy theory, provide a catalyst for a wider discussion about Gestalt therapy, and engage new ranks of theorists and clinicians in refining and advancing further this exceptional theory and practice.

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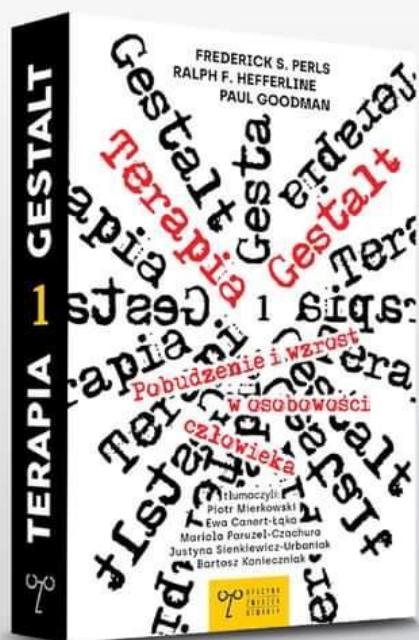
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