

# I AND THOU, HERE AND NOW: CONTRIBUTIONS OF GESTALT THERAPY

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## Introductory Remarks

**G**ESTALT THERAPY is a label that makes reference to the psychiatric approach and procedures developed by Dr. Frederick Perls. This approach, practiced by his trainees all over the United States, is fragmentarily described in his books (Perls, 1966, Perls, 1965). Essentially a form of existential psychiatry,<sup>1</sup> it is also characterized by the relevance of the holistic and gestaltist conception as well as many notions derived from psychoanalytic theory. Its most specific link with psychoanalytic therapy lies in its concern with body language. In this concern Perls has expressed his indebtedness to Wilhelm Reich. The uniqueness of Gestalt Therapy does not lie in a theory of personality of the neuroses, nor, for that matter, does it lie in theory at all. It is essentially a nonverbal creation, an approach to people in the therapeutic situation which has developed out of understanding, experience and intuition, and continued to be transmitted nonverbally.

I think the essence of therapy is more than an application of ideas, a living fact to be explained a posteriori, and Gestalt Therapy is no exception. I see a unity among its different devices, and can elaborate on their rationale, but someone else might look at the same facts

1. Gestalt Therapy is one of the three psychiatric schools which have arisen from phenomenology and existentialism, the other two being Frankl's logotherapy and Binswanger's Dasein Analyse. Of these, the latter does not and cannot claim to be a therapeutic procedure. Van Dusen, in his discussion of existential analytic therapy, claims that "There is a psychotherapeutic approach which most closely fits the theory. In fact, a close adherence to the theory demands a particular approach. The approach has been called Gestalt Therapy, and considerable credit for it is due Dr. F. S. Perls" (Van Dusen, 1960).

from a different point of view and in terms of a different conceptual framework. I will, therefore, in the following pages, focus on therapeutic methods, restricting the more abstract comments to what is of immediate relevance to the description of procedures.

I believe the techniques of Gestalt Therapy can very well be conceived as exercises for individual use. However, it is in this context that Perls has described most of them in his books. When he describes "concentration on eating," "undoing of retroflexions," "body concentration" (Perls, 1966), "feeling the actual," "sensing opposed forces," "attending and concentrating" (Perls, 1965), etc., he is addressing the reader and not a psychotherapist, and he assumes that anybody can set himself to experiment with the procedures.

True as this may be, I have chosen to describe the techniques in the context of the two-person therapeutic situation, since the overt dialogue between patient and therapist lends itself well as an example of the inner dialogue in him who wants to be his own therapist. I also believe there are advantages in the two-person situation, and I think the average person would be in a better position to proceed on his own after an initial contact with someone more *awakened* than himself, or who may at least supplement his own awareness. Parenthetically, I may here state that I also believe this to be true of all spiritual exercises: that though we can only tackle certain inner struggles by ourselves, we may get there faster with the help, support and challenge of somebody ahead of us in experience. Nevertheless, it is up to the reader to decide what he may do with the ideas in this chapter, and I would emphatically advise him to try them out at least twice before pronouncing judgment.

The immediate aim of Gestalt Therapy is the restoration of awareness. The ultimate goal is the restoration of the functions of the organism and personality, which will make an individual whole and release his potentialities. It assumes that awareness by itself will bring about development and change.

It is an agreed-upon concept of depth psychology that the essence of healing lies in the process of becoming conscious of the unconscious. The emphasis of Gestalt Therapy on awareness rather than consciousness or understanding points further to the importance of contacting the immediate ongoing process Here and Now and better suggests the sensory and feeling basis of such processes.

Accordingly, the intervention of the therapist is essentially noninterpretative, and directed to the awakening of the patient's own awareness of what he is doing and feeling. The emphasis definitely doesn't lie in explaining behavior, in understanding why, but in perceiving how it proceeds. This awareness by itself brings about a new experience and a new challenge to awareness.

### **Staying in the Continuum of Awareness**

A basic procedure in Gestalt Therapy is that of staying in what Perls has designated "the continuum of awareness." The patient here is asked to simply express what he is experiencing. Here the emphasis on *experiencing* makes the situation very different from free association of thought, in which not only abstractions but memories and anticipations constitute much of the verbal output. In fact, most persons will discover to their own surprise that they have enormous difficulty staying in awareness of their experience for more than a few seconds. At a given point they will turn to thinking (computing in Perls' jargon), to remembering, or to fantasies about the future. All of these, in a situation in which the task is to stay with the present experience, are regarded to be forms of avoidance. It is important to contact the experience that led to the avoidance, by returning to the points at which there was an interruption in the awareness of the present. It will then be found that there was at that point some discomfort or fear that prompted the subject to establish a distance by thought or to escape from the instant. Furthermore, awareness may possibly extend into the underlying experience at the time of thinking, so that the patient notices that he is explaining himself in fear of not being understood, justifying himself to counteract his feeling of guilt, offering an interesting thought or observation to be appreciated, etc. In the same way the awareness of fantasies can be deepened to the point of contacting what the *subject* is *doing* with them, and to the discomfort at the root of the urge to do what he is doing. Not only the activity of thought and fantasy are stimulated by the need of avoiding or counteracting an experience, but physical activity as well. Posture, movements of hands and feet, facial expression and intonation of the voice, all convey either the feeling that was excluded from awareness and the effort to ward it off or counteract it, or both. The function of the therapist is to redirect the patient's attention to his experience of himself: Are you aware of what you

are doing with your hands? I noticed your voice sounds different now, can you hear it? Can you see where you stopped, and began to make a case, and so on. The expression of experience is not a matter of an all-or-none response. For example, the patient's form of reporting may be at any point between real expression and *talking about* himself as an outside observer, and he will be unaware of his implicit avoidance of identifying with himself (and taking responsibility for it). The therapist may choose to concentrate on this at the beginning, so that the patient becomes more aware of what is the basic experience and what is his elaboration or his diluting of it in irrelevant words and concepts. For example:

T: What is your experience now?

P: I feel there are several persons I don't know in the room and perhaps they may not understand what I say.

T: That is a thought, and an expectation, not an experience. Try to express your experience now.

P: It is like what I feel when . . . I guess it could be called fear.

T: Can you describe what you are feeling now?

P: My hands are trembling. My voice quivers. I am afraid.

Directness is often dimmed in English by recourse to it and related figures of speech on occasions in which either I or you are implied (and avoided). It may be fruitful to point out such alienated statements and ask the patient to reword them,<sup>2</sup> e.g.:

P: My hand is doing this movement . . .

T: Is it doing the movement?

P: I am moving my hand like this . . . and now the thought comes to me that. . .

T: The thought "comes" to you?

P: I have the thought.

T: You *have* it?

P: I think. Yes. I think that I use "it" very much, and I am glad that by noticing it I can bring it all back to me.

T: Bring it back?

P: *Bring myself* back. I feel thankful for this.

T: This?

P: Your idea about the "it."

2. "Everytime you do apply the proper Ego-language you express yourself, you assist in the development of your personality" (Perls, 1966).

T: My idea?

P: I feel thankful towards you.

Perls conceives personality as comprising three layers: The surface is constituted of the roles we enact in manipulating the environment, the games we play. When we do away with such phoney personality we are confronted with an area of deadness, nothingness, emptiness (the implosive layer) and only by working through, and giving in to that deadness can one come to real life—the explosive layer of true feelings and strivings. The exercise in staying with awareness will eventually lead the individual to an impasse, a nothingness in which the forces of resistance are equal to what he is resisting. So the next stage is working on the impasse. Here again the aim is to restore awareness to the activity that there is in the apparent paralysis. The patient that seems to be unmoved is being pushed or torn by opposing forces of equal strength, and must be brought in contact with them. More than that, he has to recognize that these opposing forces are himself, his own potential. In psychological terms, the Ego has to identify with the alienated functions as processes.

An example may make this more clear:

When the therapist asks the patient to pay attention to his own voice, the patient becomes aware of it and reports a sad intonation. As he does this there is a change in his facial expression. The therapist comments on this, too. "Yes, I feel some moisture on my eyes." The therapist then asks, "What would your tears say if they could speak?" The reply is, "We feel shy. We would like to come out but we don't dare." Since a conflict has been exposed, the therapist now instructs him to alternately take sides in himself with the desire to cry and "with the desire to resist the crying." This leads to a dialogue between the little tender baby and the *tough man* in the patient, and to an acceptance of both, and an understanding between them.

### **Enacting**

It can be seen in this example that each statement of the therapist leads the patient to identify, to become his unconscious and alienated activity. His voice first, then his tears, finally the desire to refrain from weeping. The greatest resource for this purpose is that of dramatization, and in this we find the second tool of Gestalt Therapy. As awareness leads to some action, so does deliberate acting lead

to expanded awareness. Through the attitude of taking sides and acting out any alienated movement, feeling or thought can be developed, contacted and reassimilated by the Ego. It can be one's own voice, a gesture, a fleeting suspicion, a figure of speech, an imagined attitude of the therapist, a fantasy. The therapist will typically propose this at the moment in which he notices an inconsistency between the verbal and nonverbal expression of the patient, suggesting to him to be his posture, to develop a movement of the fingers, to put into words a smile, or to impersonate the therapist and answer his own question. An illustration here may be helpful:

P: I would like to understand . . .

T: I hear a wailing in your voice. Can you hear it?

P: Yes . . . There is a trembling . . .

T: Be your voice now.

P: I am a weak, complaining voice, the voice of a child that doesn't dare to demand. He is afraid . . .

T: I am . . .

P: I am a little boy and I am afraid to ask for anything, can only ask for what I want by showing my sadness, so that mommy will have pity and take care of me . . .

T: Could you be your mother, now?

Here we see in succession the enacting of the voice, of the child and the mother. A dialogue between the two eventually showed the actor how he was manipulating others by playing the helpless child and how he was hating himself for his deviousness. This awareness was not achieved by analyzing the past or talking about his present but rather by letting his behavior develop and, so to say, speak for itself. The individual is not encouraged to become an observer of himself (alienating himself further from his doings) and compute an interpretation, but to merge with his actions, and have them say what they want.

### **The Handling of Conflicts—Reversal, "Taking Sides" and Encountering**

The strategies discussed thus far—the exercising of awareness and that of acting, impersonating one's self—are the two aspects (the contemplative and the active) of one indivisible process: we can only

become really aware of what we do or perceive while doing it, and we can only have the experience of being the actor, the doer, the perceiver, when these functions are in our awareness. In other words, there is no real distinction between being aware, contacting our experience, becoming ourselves, entering our bodily or mental processes and becoming one with them. The alternative to this, the state in which we think of ourselves as removed from ourselves and our experience is one in which we are creating an artificial boundary between self and not-self, and therefore asserting an illusory separateness from the stream of life—our life. In this duality lies the root of all inner conflicts.

We may be no more aware of the extent of our intrapsychic conflicts than we are of our sleepwalker-like restriction of awareness or our estrangement from ourselves, yet the lack of unity in neurotic functioning is as pervasive as the lack of awareness or the lack of identification with ourselves. And, again, it is no more than a facet of the same happening. In the same way that total awareness involves opening up to the bliss of the eternal Here and Now, and the end of our alienation involves the realization of the Upanishadic "That art thou," "Thou art God," so the end of conflict—the synthesis of opposites—involves being one with life, surrendering to the push of its stream and being it at the same time, relinquishing any individual will other than the will of life through us—our true self.

The strategies of Gestalt Therapy in dealing with conflict—reversal and encountering—constitute an elaboration of those discussed thus far and are among its most original contributions to psychiatry.

Whenever a conflict is experienced as such ("I would like to but I don't dare," "I am not sure whether I like it," "I feel like crying but I cannot," etc.) it is generally easy to take sides with the alternatives and become involved in the fullest possible experience of each at a time. It may be that either one or both conflicting tendencies are being experienced as non-self, so it has to be reassimilated by the Ego through the active effort to impersonate it, to become it by living it from the inside. It is an assumption of Gestalt Therapy that hardly ever or never will the solution be an either-or. Since both tendencies are living forces in the individual, "each element of the self style must be experienced so that the person can use it when necessary. Freedom is the choice and responsibility taken for the

style element used.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the approach is not one of doing away with the elements of the personality (such as resistances or the commands of the Super-Ego) but of reassimilating them into the Ego. Becoming aware of what happens in us is to become aware that *we* do it, and by so becoming it, we have both the potential and the control. “Do not be tempted to give up your style until you have experienced it. Otherwise you give up one false God to worship another.”

### Reversal

Whenever a conflict is not experienced as such, it may not be so easy to act out and experience its sides, yet a therapist may see enough of the contradiction to point it out. If the patient smiles while being critical, for instance, he may suggest to him to act critical and severe, first, and then, after having expressed his attacking side, to develop that ingratiating smile. Or if the patient is feeling critical towards her own relaxed, lazy posture, the therapist may guess that she is only avoiding the awareness of the other half of her experience: that she wants and enjoys this posture, since after all she is assuming it. So he may instruct her to exaggerate and give in to her laziness, until she is able to be one with her unacknowledged urge. In a similar fashion, he may propose to someone who is feeling guilty, carrying the well-deserved blame, to act resentful in face of undeserved criticism, thus trying out a reversal in his perception of the situation and himself. Or he may tell a little old lady to say nasty things and yell, if it is obvious to him that she is not acknowledging and expressing her hostile reactions. The principle involved in all such instances is that of taking up attitudes which are opposite to those the person has been assuming.

We live in only a fragment of ourselves, holding on to a pre-established self-image and rejecting as non-self all that is conflicting with it or that we expect to be painful. In this island of personality we feel impoverished and helpless, subjected to the pulls and pushes of impulses or compulsions. Gestalt Therapy suggests that we regard the self-image as the figure in the figure-ground relationship that is involved in all perception. In order to regain from the background what has been rejected from the self, this therapeutic approach in-

3. Gene Sagan: unpublished manuscript.

4. *Ibid.*

vites us to reverse the figure-ground relationship involved in this self-perception, and start experiencing ourselves as the background: not the one that is being depressed, but the one that depresses himself; not the one that feels guilty, but the inner judge condemning himself; not the one that feels half dead, but the one that does the chronic self-rejection and killing. Only by sensing how he does this can a person stop doing it, and put to better use his energies than engaging in fruitless battles.

The principle of reversal can be applied not only to feelings but also to physical attitudes. Opening up when in a closed posture, breathing deeply as an alternative to a restraint in the intake of air or exhalation, exchanging the motor attitudes of left and right, etc., can eventually lead to the unfolding of unsuspected experiences. The following is an example of this kind:

The therapist notices that while expressing his ongoing experiences the patient often interrupts what he is saying and feeling, and in such moments he swallows or sniffs. The therapist suggests that he do the opposite of sniffing and swallowing. The patient engages in a forceful and prolonged exhalation through nose and mouth, that ends with what he reports as an unfamiliar and surprising feeling: ". . . somewhat as if I were sobbing, but also pushing against a resistance, and my muscles are tense, as when I stretch in yawning; I enjoy this tension when trying to exhale to the very end of my breath, which also feels somehow like an orgasm."

Later, he discovered that he had been living with this feeling for a long time without being aware of it: "It is like wanting to burst, wanting to explode from the inside, tearing down a sort of membrane in which I am wrapped and limited. And I am at the same time this straight jacket and I am squeezing myself."

This short experience was the starting point of a spontaneous development which took place in the coming months. The muscular tension and concomitant feelings were always very much in his awareness from then onwards, and he felt more and more inclined to do physical exercise. He then discovered the pleasure of dancing and becoming much freer in his expression, both in movement and general attitude. Finally, he could sense the anger implied in his muscular contractions until he would be aware of it in his reactions to people to a degree he had not been before.

## Encountering

Taking sides and merely experiencing the tendencies involved in a conflict may sometimes be enough to precipitate a spontaneous synthesis or resolution. If not, this integration of the opposites may be brought about by their encountering.

The term *encounter* is being used with increasing frequency to describe a form of direct communication *between* people, but Perls has extended its use to include communication between intrapsychic entities or processes. These could be, for instance, the two sides of a conflict, or the experienced Ego and any specific mental content, such as a fantasy, an urge, a feeling. To him, as to Buber, the essence of the encounter is the I-Thou relationship: one in which neither party is deified by talking about you or me, but one in which the speaker directs his own activity to the other.<sup>5</sup>

In the interpersonal relationship the therapist may encourage the encounter by bringing to awareness all avoidances of the relationship, such as looking away, indirect speech, etc. In the situation of group therapy, the members may be encouraged not to talk in third person of anybody present, but express any feelings or thoughts directly to the person they refer to. Also, in the same situation, when faced with a question, individuals are encouraged not to answer but rather to respond. Regardless of the answer to a question, we do have a response when confronted with it in a given situation: indifference, eagerness to answer, fear of being exposed by the answer, annoyance, etc. Expressing this response is closer to self expression, encounter and the I-Thou relationship than an answer would generally be.

Here are some examples of how the principle of encountering can be carried into the intrapersonal domain:

### *Example 1*

A lady explains she would like to remember last night's dream. She is instructed to call the dream, to address it directly, and she says in a very low, monotonous voice, "Come dream, I want to remember you." When her attention is drawn to the lack of feeling in her calling she tries again several times with no success. In doing so she is able to experience the fact that she really does not feel an urge to remember. She feels rather indifferent towards the issue and has been misinterpreting herself assuming she had such a desire. She can now see

5. Says Buber, "There is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word *I-Thou* and the I of the primary word *I-it*."

that she has been playing the "good patient."

I perceive something. I am sensible of something. I imagine something. I will something. I feel something. I think something. The life of human beings does not consist of all this and the like alone.

This and the like together establish the realm of *It*.

But the realm of *Thou* has a different basis.

When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For when there is a thing there is another thing. Every *It* is bounded by others; *It* exists only through being bounded by others. But when *Thou* is spoken, there is no thing. *Thou* has no bounds.

When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no *thing*; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation. (Buber, 1958).

### Example 2

A woman had a dream in which she saw herself crawling across a room. Somebody asks what she is doing, and she answers: "I want to have a confrontation with that wall."—"Why don't you rather have it with a person, then?"—She answers, "People are walls."

Not only was the person replaced in the dream by a wall, but the wall itself was never reached and confronted. When told to do so in a session, the woman did so in the same position as in the dream, on her knees and bowing. "I want to go through you, wall." Taking the role of the wall, now, her reply was distant, hard and disdainful towards her meekness and docility, her posture and weak complaint. After several reversals of roles, she stood up, and further, she adopted the attitude of the wall, herself, firm, erect and hard, so she was visualizing two walls in front of each other. This felt to her like the confrontation she was seeking. A week later she reported that she had for the first time been able to confront a man in the same attitude.

A great many and perhaps the most significant encounters are particular forms of the widespread split in personality: the *I should* versus the *I want*. It may take the form of a dialogue with an imagined parent, with a disembodied self-accusation, with people in general, etc., but the parties appear again and again with distinctive feature that inspired Perls (in his inclination for a phenomenological nomenclature) to call them Top Dog and Under Dog.

Top Dog can be described as righteous, bullying, persisting, authoritarian, and primitive . . .

Under Dog develops great skill in evading Top Dog's commands. Only half-heartedly intending to comply with the demands, Under Dog answers: 'yes, but . . .,' 'I try so hard, but next time I'll do better,' and 'manana.' Under Dog usually gets the better of the conflict.

In other words, Top Dog and Under Dog are actually two clowns

performing their weird and unnecessary plays on the stage of the tolerant and mute Self. Integration, or cure, can be achieved only when the need for mutual control between Top and Under Dogs ceases. Only then will the two masters mutually listen. Once they come to their senses (in this case listening to each other), does the door to integration and unification open. The chance of making a whole person out of a split becomes a certainty. (Perls, 1961).

The following encounter (written by the patient in a therapeutic encounter) does not lead to full integration, but nevertheless illustrates the procedure:

*Here and Now*

C. says might try encounter between the monk and the beast.

Monk: Terrible, terrible, the pains of the flesh.

New I: No pain necessary right now—listen to "Trout" and enjoy grok<sup>6</sup> the sunshine, grok the trembling, which is for opening the Door, man.

Monk: You make me feel so lonely, Charles.

New I: Thanks for naming me. Now I can proceed to fuck or at least *feel* something down *here* between the legs.

Monk: That is a dog, that puts his tail between his legs.

New I: Then you are a dog, sir.

Monk: *How dare you!*

New I: Now you're acting like Miss Henrietta. Reach down there, man, and feel your balls, for a change.

Monk: Don't use such vulgar language.

New I: Just for that, sir, I sentence you to 90 days and nights of extreme pleasure.

Monk: *Anything*, so long as you don't play the Japanese music. (Just the mention of that makes me tremble clear up to the armpits.)

New I: I am going to play that, man, exactly as soon as this fucking "Trout" quintet peters out.

(This Japanese music is very pleasant—rather innocent. *Well, that's the way to start*, in innocence. *Puer aeternis* is thyself and every other beautiful person.)

6. Neologism introduced by Robert Heinlein in his novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land*: a martian word originally signifying "to drink," "Grok also means to understand so thoroughly that the observer becomes a part of the observed—to merge, blend, intermarry, lose identity in the group experience."

Yes, it's cruelty of myself, to my body. The monk tortured and killed my body. No wonder I put the Crucifix above the bed: "the man who died.")

Monk: I became what I am because you left your playmates behind in Minnesota.

New I: Makes no sense.

Monk: "Lose your mind and come to your senses."

New I: You're getting pretty sharp, man.

Monk: Thanks for calling me that, son.

New I: I'm not your son, thank God.

Monk: I see you recognize me.

New I: You mean, I presume, that every man who oppresses the body is my mother. By the way, are you aware of the fact that we have reversed positions?

Monk: Wasn't so important as we thought, was it?

This last sentence sprang from the feeling that the two characters were not in antithetical roles any more. Both have changed to the point of sharing the same traits. (The "New I" does the torturing, the monk feels victimized), so that now it does not make much difference who is called by what name or who is in what position.

### **Focusing on Dreams**

The procedures discussed thus far constitute the embodiment of three principles: (a) that of bringing the spontaneous activity into awareness, (b) that of identification or taking sides with such spontaneous activity and (c) the integration of personality functions or activities by bringing them into a relationship or encounter. Though any experience can be the object of such approaches and procedures, a special place must be granted to our most spontaneous activity, which is dreaming. In fact, dreamwork is one of the most original contributions of Perls to the therapeutic traditions.

As in the case with Gestalt Therapy in general, its approach to dreams is non-interpretative, and yet it views the dream as an existential message that is to be understood. Understanding in this context refers to the direct experience of the dream's content rather than to an intellectual influence, in the same way that awareness stands in opposition to an intellectual insight. The road to awareness, here too, is letting the experience speak for itself rather than thinking

about it, entering the dream rather than bringing it to mind. In accordance with this, it is important that the dream be not only remembered, but brought back to life. Only by experiencing it *now* can we gain an awareness of what it is conveying. It is therefore advisable to begin by narrating the dream in the present tense, as if it were happening at the moment.

The mere change in wording implied in the use of the present tense instead of the past may be enough to bring about a great difference in the process of recall, which now, to some extent, becomes a returning to the dream and the feelings that go with the fantasy. This may be an adequate moment to sense its metaphorical language by thinking or saying before every sentence: "This is my existence." Thus, saying: "This is my existence: I am rolling a peanut with my nose," made a dreamer aware of how in her life she was adopting an overly humble role, kneeling down and preoccupied with menial tasks instead of standing up and facing the important issues. In another instance, by saying, "This is my life: I am driving on a freeway and would like to pull off and sleep," he realized how he was feeling caught in a conflict between a compulsive, stressful and lifeless race for power and the wish to relax, enjoy and dream.

It may not be easy for some to produce anything more than a dry recall of dream images, in spite of the effort to re-experience, and this only indicates the strength of the tendency to alienate the dream from the individual's own experience. This alienation is, to some extent, present in every dream, so the task of Gestalt Therapy is that of reassimilating it into the Ego and having the person take responsibility for his unacknowledged forces, now projected out *there* as strange images. When the attempt at actualization and contemplation of the dream does not lead to more than verbal formulas, such reassimilation may be effected through the acting-out of the different elements in the content.

The acting-out of a dream necessarily entails a creative experience of interpretation or translation into movement, and as such it involves an extension of the creative activity expressed in the dream itself. But this is not the only way in which the dreamwork can be expanded. It may be fruitful to **fill** in the gaps with fantasy or finish the dream where it was forgotten by waking up. In being faced with this task the individual necessarily turns into a dreamer again, and

becomes one with his dreaming self. Or he may give words to characters that only felt unspoken emotions in the dream, *so* that they now engage in a dialogue. This is only feasible if the individual really listens to his dream by becoming part of it.

A man relates a dream in which he sees himself in a corridor full of lockers. He is looking for some books that he has kept in one of them, but does not remember which. An attendant approaches him and tries to help him, but with no success. Here the alarm clock rings and he wakes up. When told to go on dreaming, he fantasies that he finally finds the locker and opens it.

When instructed to sense this image as his existence he reported that he was actually feeling "in a corridor full of lockers." His life felt grey, enclosed, impoverished, boring, and unsatisfactory, as if he were searching for something with no success.

The following are some excerpts of the play-acting that followed:

(Here comes the attendant. He takes the key and wants to help me. I know better than he where I left my books . . .)

T: Tell him.

P: You can't help me. I know better than you and can do best when undisturbed. Leave me alone.

T: What does he answer?

P: I am sorry sir. I only wanted to help you. . .

T: Be the locker now.

P: Here I am, a grey locker. I have a number on me. People come and use me. They open me and close me; they put things in and take things out of me. I am pretty tired of this. I am sick and tired of it! How I would like to disappear, not to be found again! . . . I know now . . . I know I can play a trick on this fellow; I can have him be deceived so he doesn't find me! Yes, I will have the attendant "help" him, so he is misled and does not find me.

T: Be yourself opening the locker, now.

P: (He goes through the movements in a pantomime and exclaims: So it was you! You, trying to deceive me!)

T: What does the locker answer?

P: Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

The patient ends expressing that triumphant mockery in a dance, turning slowly and powerfully at the center of the room while he laughs.

T: Do you still feel grey and like a number?

P: Not any more.

The illustration shows how meaningful it can be to identify with objects, and not only human or animal characters, in a dream. This, too, was an instance of a figure-ground reversal, by means of which

the patient came to experience himself as the one playing hide-and-seek with himself, and not merely the searching victim. When his self-defeating wish was enacted and channeled into the dance he was not in an impasse any more but creatively expressing himself and feeling himself as a living being.

The integration of these selves—the full acceptance of how one *is*, rather than how one *should* be leads to the possibility of change. As long as people persist in remaining split and not fully acknowledging (taking sides with and experiencing) what and how they are—real change—I believe—is impossible (Simkin, 1965).

Although I believe all of the techniques described in this chapter can be advantageously used by the individual, I think the procedure that lends itself best to the therapeutic situation may be the exploration of dreams. Not only is the dream "the royal road to the unconscious," so that it can be a guarantee of starting off with a very significant theme (however insignificant it may appear), it also provides a convenient blueprint to follow when applying the diverse exercises of Gestalt Therapy. For the one who is willing to explore on his own, here is an outline to follow:

1. When you wake up in the morning, write down the dreams with the greatest possible detail.
2. Look in the dream for unfinished situations or anything that you have been avoiding, and finish the story in the spirit of not avoiding.
3. Say the dream aloud as if the action in it were actually happening in the present, and be aware of yourself and what you are feeling while you do so: is the intonation of your voice compatible with the reactions you are reporting: What is your breathing doing? etc.
4. Go over your dream once more, still in the present tense, and contemplate it as a picture of your existence: Does it make sense?
5. List the elements in the dream: human characters, animals, objects, elements of nature (wind, earthquake, fire, etc.)
6. Act out the completed dream story from the point of view of yourself in it, placing special emphasis on the avoided situation (falling, dying, being caught, etc.)
7. Play each of the other elements, giving them a voice and

letting them speak for themselves and their wants ("I am a hard rock, a very old rock polished by the centuries," "I am the wind, powerful, free, invisible, uprooted," etc.)

8. Look for pairs of opposites and engage them in encounter. In doing this, you may want to write down a sketch, and then play it to the best of your dramatic ability. While giving words to your characters, (including yourself) do not just make up sentences, but *try* to impersonate them, enter the situation, and honestly express your reactions in each role.

9. While doing all of this, *be aware!*

10. Did you get the message, your dream's message, *your* message, *yourself*?

The four visions that I include as a final illustration are particularly relevant to the application of the foregoing suggestions outside the two person therapeutic encounter. The poetess who wrote them had been deeply affected by the Top Dog—Under Dog confrontations in a few sessions with me, and was particularly impressed by the effect of reversing roles with a sadistic mother image. This reversal and becoming the other in the encounter, as well as the enacting of her fantasy images in general, soon became spontaneous attitudes to her, and led to the ecstatic merging with the elements while writing the following lines:

***Four Visions***

***I***

We swim together  
in a clear pool of water  
like two tadpoles  
close to each other .  
face to face  
ready to mate  
and we stop swimming  
and tread water  
and the water slowly turns  
blue blue blue  
cherulean peacock blue  
and slowly we too  
turn the same blue  
our arms our bodies  
our necks and finally  
our faces  
and we merge with the water  
into the water  
and we merge with each other  
into each other.

***II***

Among the big green leaves  
of the plane trees  
I make my bed  
on blue sheets of air  
the wind rustles the leaves  
against my white voile gown  
lifts the gauze  
the leaves caress my limbs  
through the thin veiling  
enfold me in their hands  
and I dissolve  
to liquid smoke or fog  
and merge into each leaf  
become a flock of  
small gray birds  
that sing and sing and sing  
from inside each leaf  
with high thin delicate voices  
the whole tree sings  
with every leaf.

## III

The eastern sky is pale  
 yellow air  
 and I a traced line  
 in morning sungold coming  
 with many other girl graces  
 toward the light  
 by banks of thin clouds  
 below the whole earth  
 where sleep all  
 now the rolling red ball  
 fire comes toward us  
 burns through our air bodies  
 reflects rosy below  
 sweats smiles  
 as he rises smiling giant  
 climbs to the sky  
 drops tears and sweat  
 of hot sungold  
 down to us we glide  
 down to it on earth  
 it becomes sunshine  
 our traces part of it  
 we fall with it  
 rest on fields of grass  
 and sway on each head  
 of wheat on each blade  
 and we become laughter  
 of pure light and colour.

## IV

A black tall slim shadow  
 against the blue-grey  
 water coming in small waves  
 in from faded sky  
 the shadow flat  
 not molded round like  
 sculpture or man  
 shallow or hollow  
 as a shadow  
 or a mirror dark  
 entrance to another world  
 where it is the beast  
 I come but do not fit  
 the shadow  
 my yellow hair flies soft  
 in the bare wind  
 my shadow white and round  
 against blue-black water  
 the shadow shrinks  
 down to my size moves  
 as if to embrace me  
 shrinks more  
 into my white arms  
 into my white thighs  
 into my belly  
 into my head until  
 I finally sink  
 into the dark beast shape  
 and become one  
 with its dark world beyond  
 fill the space and  
 finally am one with the world.

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