



GESTALT THERAPY

Around the World

Edited by Eleanor O'Leary

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Gestalt Therapy Around the World

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To my nephews and nieces, who bring so much joy to my life – Martin, Denis, Eoin, Dermot, Shane, Robert, Sarah, Kevin, Alice, and Maeve.

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Contributors

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Walter Arnold has a Masters in Philosophy and advanced special training in gestalt therapy (VET). His background training consisted of philosophy, anthropology, filmmaking, granite sculpture and avant garde dance performed at the professional level. He is a licensed psychologist and a licensed psychotherapist. He served as a yearly visiting lecturer at the University of Helsinki, has conducted workshops at the University of Cork, Ireland, and has lectured at gestalt therapy conferences. A founding member of the International Gestalt Therapy Association (IGTA), he has been chairman both of IGTA and of its Journal Committee which established the *International Gestalt Journal* (IGJ) in 2002. A former member of the Philosophy Committee of the Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy, he has written books on *Contact-Dialogue Experienced: On Gestalt Therapy* (1998) and *Culture, Identity and Language* (1999). He has published articles on gestalt therapy and the meaning of a mother tongue. He has translated the Finnish epic “Kalevala,” which is considered as one of the greatest epics of the world. As a tennis coach, he is on the court every morning at seven.

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Serge Ginger was born February 6, 1928, and died on November 1, 2011. He was a clinical psychologist and a trainer in gestalt therapy. His first training and professional practice was in the field of education. He founded several associations, initially for disabled youth and subsequently in the field of psychology and gestalt therapy. Serge founded the SFG (Société française de Gestalt) and, with his wife Anne, the EPG (École parisienne de Gestalt), both in 1981, the International Federation of Gestalt Training Centres (1991) and the FF2P (Fédération française de Psychothérapie et Psychanalyse) in 1995. He remained active till the end in the negotiations between government and accredited psychologists for the legal recognition of their practice. He published several articles and authored/co-authored 27 books, a great part of them on gestalt therapy: its theoretical basis, ethical practice, and guidelines for supervision. His final article was one which he wrote in co-operation with Anne Ginger, namely "A practical guide for humanistic psychologists" (2011). Some of his books have been translated into several languages.

James Hammink, MA, is a psychologist. He works in private practice doing psychotherapy, teaching, and supervision and is particularly interested in the interface between psychological self-development and meditation practice. He is co-founder of the Center for Integrative Gestalt Practice.

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Dr Francisco Huneeus grew up in the USA and then moved to Chile, where he received his MD from the University of Chile. He was recruited by Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a research associate in neurobiology. In 1970, while undertaking a psychiatry internship, he came upon a paper written by Fritz Perls published by Real People Press. He started Editorial Cuatro Vientos, publishing *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, and continued with translations of books on gestalt therapy, the first book being on neuro-linguistic programming, and gestalt body work with illness by Dr Schnake, President of the Independent Publishers. He is a practicing psychiatrist in the public health system working with working-class clients. He has published *Language, Thought and Disease* and is currently working on the effects of the media on the minds of individuals using gestalt theory. He is a member of the Editorial committee of *The Gestalt Review*. He plays horn in chamber groups, cycles to work every day in downtown Santiago, and directs a dance improvization group.

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Almut Ladisich-Raine was born in 1944. She has a Diploma in Psychology and is a licensed clinical psychotherapist in her own private practice since 1978, having gained experience working as a clinical psychologist with psychiatric and addicted patients. She trained with Jim Simkin and Erving and Miriam Polster in the 1970s and is one of the early pioneers of gestalt therapy in Germany. Co-founder of the Institute of Integrative Gestalt Therapy, Würzburg (IGW), she has worked as a trainer and supervisor for the last thirty-five years, as well as being co-founder of the DVG – the German roof-organization for gestalt therapy. She has been guest lecturer at several universities (LMU, Munich; University of La Paz, Bolivia; Sigmund-Freud-University, Vienna; and Fuzhou University, China) and has published several papers on the topic.

Dr Nurith Levi, MSW, is certified in Family Therapy and is a graduate of the Faye Ratner Gestalt Program at Tel-Aviv University and founder and chairperson of the Israeli Association of Gestalt Therapy. A member of the European Association of Gestalt Therapy, she trains and leads gestalt workshops throughout

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Anne Maclean has a background in education and community work. In 1991, she was co-founder, administrator, and a faculty member of the Gestalt Institute of New Zealand. She has been in private practice as a gestalt therapist, an organizational consultant, a supervisor, and a teacher of group work and supervisory skills. She is a writer and editor and was a co-editor of, and contributor to, two collections of New Zealand and Australian articles: *Grounds for Gestalt* (1994) and *More Grounds for Gestalt* (1996). In 2002, her book *The Heart of Supervision* was published in the USA. During 2004–2005 she established the *Gestalt Journal of Australia and New Zealand* and co-edited the first two volumes. In 2011, *Te Waka Huia – The Treasure Box* was published in New Zealand, a book about the esoteric wisdom of the ancient Maori culture which makes invaluable sense in today's world.

Dr Joseph Melnick is a clinical and organizational psychologist, co-chair of the Cape Cod Training Program of the Gestalt International Study Center (GISC), and a member of the board of GISC. He is a member of the professional staff, as well as a former board member, of the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland. Founding Editor of *Gestalt Review*, a contemporary peer-reviewed gestalt journal, he has published extensively on various aspects of the gestalt therapy approach, such as group process, intimacy, ethics, countertransference, organizational development, and conflict. Most recently, he has co-edited (with Edwin C. Nevis) *Mending the World: Social Healing Interventions by Gestalt Practitioners Worldwide*, a book of case studies by gestalt organizational consultants, and is currently completing a book on the Cape Cod Model of Gestalt Therapy with Sonia March Nevis. He is also the creator of “The Us Factor,” a combination of a workbook and DVD series on how to improve your marriage. He teaches and trains worldwide.

Professor Eleanor O’Leary completed her Ph.D. entitled “Person centred therapy: core conditions and core outcomes” in 1979. The thesis was subsequently published by Cork University Press as *The Psychology of Counselling*. She has held a number of academic positions including Professor and Head of the Department of Applied Psychology at University College Cork, Ireland, and Visiting Professor at Stanford University, California. She has authored several books, the most recent of which is entitled *New Approaches to Integration in Psychotherapy* (with Mike Murphy, 2006). She has received international recognition for her work, which has included approximately fifty articles in the field of psychotherapy, and has presented keynote addresses at international conferences. The combination of her academic and clinical expertise gives her a broad insight into the development of gestalt therapy.

Brian O’Neill, BA(Hons), MAPS, is co-director of the Illawarra Gestalt Centre, and visiting faculty member of gestalt training programs in Australia, the USA, and Europe. He is past President of the Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy (AAGT), founding editor of the *Gestalt Therapy Forum* (New York), and is on the editorial boards of the *Gestalt Review* and *Studies in Gestalt*.

He and his wife Jenny have written extensively on gestalt therapy, particularly couples and family therapy. He is a senior fellow in mental health at the University of Wollongong, was awarded the Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Gold Medal for achievement in research, education, and practice by the Governor General in 1996, and is currently the senior clinical manager for Catholic Family and Community Services in Queensland.

Peter Philippon, MSc, is a gestalt psychotherapist, trainer, and writer. He is a Founder Member of the Manchester Gestalt Centre, Full Member of the New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy, Teaching and Supervising Member of GPTI in the UK, Senior Trainer of GITA in Slovenia, and past President of the Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy. He is author of *Self in Relation* (Gestalt Journal Press, 2001), *The Emergent Self: An Existential-Gestalt Approach* (UKCP/Karnac, 2009), and *Gestalt Therapy: Roots and Branches* (Karnac, 2012). Peter is a teacher and student of aikido.

Myriam Sas Guiter obtained her psychology degrees from the University of Buenos Aires. Co-founder of the Gestalt Association of Buenos Aires, she has served as program director, scientific secretary, and senior faculty. She leads the Colloquium in Gestalt in Buenos Aires, where she invites outstanding gestalt therapists from all over the world to give presentations. She has spread the gestalt approach to groups in her college seminars and is dedicated to clinical practice with adults, to relational aspects linked to submission in couples, family, and the community and as a supervisor. Among her published articles are “Ideas para el vivir” (Ideas for living), “Exigencia y cambio” (Demanding and change), “Recuperación emocional del docente” (Emotional recovering for teachers), and “Sobre certezas e incertidumbres” (About certainties and uncertainties). A founding member of the International Gestalt Therapy Association and member of the Board of Directors, she was Chair of the Inaugural Conference Committee in Montreal 2002. She has presented at conferences in Spain, Canada, USA, Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, and Argentina. She is a member of the Editorial Board of the *Latin Review of Gestalt Therapy* and of *Aware*, an online review of gestalt therapy in Brazil.

Professor Shraga Serok, born in Poland, 1929, immigrated to Israel in 1949, and earned his PhD from Case Western Reserve University, USA, in 1975. He completed a three-year postgraduate program at the Gestalt Institute in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1975 and undertook additional gestalt training with Laura Perls, Isadore From, and Erv and Miriam Polster. He was a founder member and professor of the Department of Social Work, Ben-Gurion University, Beer Sheva, Israel, and has served as its chairman. Professor Serok was the founder of the Faye Ratner Gestalt Program at Tel-Aviv University and its director for twenty years. He introduced the promotion of gestalt therapy into Israeli academia. His professional experience includes teaching human development, psychopathology, and gestalt therapy. His research has been concentrated in various areas of psychotherapy, and the development of a theory of applied gestalt therapy in social integration. He also has a thriving private practice. Professor Serok has published two books and over fifty articles in international journals and is widely known for his presentations and workshops at international conferences.

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Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb, psychologist and licensed psychotherapist, is founder and director, since 1979, of the Istituto di Gestalt HCC, the first school of gestalt psychotherapy in Italy. Since 1994, the Institute has been approved by the Minister for Universities, according to the Italian law on psychotherapy. She is a well-known gestalt therapy international trainer, a Full Member of the New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy, past president of the Italian Federation of the Associations of Psychotherapy (FIAP), past president and first Honorary Member of the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT), and past and Honorary President of the Italian Association of Gestalt Psychotherapy (SIPG). She has, since 1985, edited the Italian journal *Quaderni di Gestalt* and has co-edited the international journal *Studies in Gestalt Therapy: Dialogical Bridges*. She has written many articles and chapters published in various languages, has edited five volumes and written two books, the most recent being *The Now-for-Next in Psychotherapy. Gestalt Therapy Recounted in the Post-Modern Society* (Franco Angeli Publisher, Milan, 2011).

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Preface

Three outstanding events have had a significant influence on my life – having a personal experience of Jesus when I was seven years old, coming in contact with gestalt therapy in the late 1970s, and having the privilege of being present at the visionary shrine of Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2011. This book deals with the results of coming in contact with gestalt therapy. This experience opened a new door in my life at a very fundamental human level that was enriched further during my training. The metaphors for this experience have been chosen by me on the covers of my two books on gestalt therapy – lightning representing an illuminated world in my first book and a light bulb in the second.

My first book on the subject of gestalt therapy in 1992 was in the first instance aimed at our Irish trainees, as they had reported difficulty in grasping the meaning of some of what is frequently referred to as the “Bible” of gestalt therapy, namely, Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman’s (1951) *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. Subsequently, it was brought to my attention that, for the same reason, students at the Gestalt Institute of Santa Cruz bought this book in bulk when they attended conferences in London.

The first objective of this book is to expand the issues discussed in my 1992 book, which is the basis for the first four chapters of this book. One contribution of gestalt therapy lies in its attention to feelings, thoughts, behavior, and the body. Clients develop the ability to center and ground themselves particularly through the use of breathing and to become aware of their bodily experiences. They are able to live in the here and now of their lives and notice and take cognizance of moment-to-moment changes in their internal and external world. They can express and accept feelings and, where relevant, finish unfinished business either from their past or present life. They move towards interdependence and self-support rather than maladaptive dependence on others and develop further self-responsibility. These changes emerge from the dialogical relationship that exists between the therapist and client. While a number of the concepts and principles discussed in this book remain close to the view of gestalt therapy as laid

down by the original founders, the author brings her own stamp to the subject, particularly in the chapter on dialogue and contact in her attention to empathy, authenticity, and story. The impact of two of the great theorist-practitioners of gestalt therapy, Erving and the late Miriam Polster, can be found in the sections relating to contact in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, attention is given to the appropriate use of techniques and dreams in gestalt therapy, while Joseph Zinker's work on experiments is also considered. Relevant examples are given in each of the three areas.

Since the death of its founder in 1970, gestalt therapy has continued to be developed and expanded worldwide. The second aim of this book is to explore major features of gestalt therapy around the world, such as history, training (past and present), theoretical contributions, research findings, and future challenges. Seventeen gestalt therapists have contributed to this work. Chapters 5 to 21 reflect the international composition of the contributors. Four continents were represented, while work in gestalt therapy in the fifth, Africa, is reported in Chapter 12.

Reports from the contributors show that Fagan and Shepherd's (1972) reference to the scarcity of published material in gestalt therapy has been addressed. Edited books such as the present one and Woldt and Toman's (2005), and authored books including Joyce and Sills (2001) and O'Leary (1992), published by international publishers Wiley and Sage, have ensured that knowledge of gestalt therapy has been disseminated to a much larger professional and lay readership. The decision that this book should be an edited one was true to the gestalt principle that experience is one of the best methods of acquiring knowledge and recognized that empirical knowledge of developments within gestalt therapy in many countries was readily available. One of the strengths of such edited books lies in the inclusion of a large number of the foremost contributors in the field. The subheadings outlined by the editor *ab initio* were selected so that the extent of achievement and deficit in certain areas would emerge. One example is that of Chile, in that the subheading relating to associations encouraged the establishment of a professional gestalt therapy association in 2010 as a direct consequence of the efforts of the contributor from that country.

Research in gestalt therapy has had a mixed history, as is evident in this book, where attention to theoretical articles far outweighs those based on empirical research articles. Nonetheless, there has been a notable improvement in output since I stated in 1992, "Research in gestalt therapy is still in its infancy. An exposure to investigative methods and research analysis as part of gestalt therapy training is both desirable and long overdue. This would probably result in new research endeavours" (O'Leary, 1992, p. 120). A subsection dealing with research to be found between Chapters 5 and 21 illustrates the progress that has been made in the majority of the countries examined.

Having addressed the two aims mentioned above, the final chapter presents a summary of international achievements in gestalt therapy based on the book and suggests some desirable initiatives for the future.

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Acknowledgments

In the first instance, I wish to say a sincere thank you to each of the sixteen authors who contributed a chapter relating to gestalt therapy in their particular country. These chapters provide an overview of gestalt therapy including history, theoretical developments, research, training, associations, and future challenges.

I am grateful to the following friends and colleagues, each of whom made a considerable contribution: Denis O'Sullivan, Michael O'Sullivan, and Aidan O'Shea for comments on the chapters authored by me; Denis for also compiling the Appendix; Mary Morrissey for observations on the initial drafts of Chapters 5 to 21 (excluding Chapter 12); Mary O'Donoghue for checking the references; Laura Maybury for contacting the contributors in relation to the submission of the first draft; Mary Murray for contributing to Chapters 2 and 4; Elizabeth Behan and Eileen McSweeney for observations on Chapters 1 to 4; and Anne Kelliher for remarks on Chapter 3.

I would also like to acknowledge my many friends, too numerous to mention, who have encouraged me throughout my career.

A special word of thanks is due to Alice Elliott and Celia Mooers Squires of Media-Psych, San Diego, for allowing me to reproduce the script of the *Impasse* film by Fritz Perls and to Pauline Tallon, Joachim Beug, Brian O'Donoghue, John O'Hanlon, and Rosita Hellstern.

My appreciation of the staff at Wiley could not be greater. The patience exhibited by Karen Shield was exemplary when the unexpected happened and I was hospitalized and subsequently involved in a lengthy convalescence. Victoria Halliday ensured that the work progressed on its recommencement, while Darren Reed and Leah Morin undertook the final tasks.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to my brothers and sister, John, Joan (O'Callaghan), and Bob, sisters-in-law and brother-in-law, Bridget, Jerry, and Kitty, who, as always, were so supportive of the endeavor. A special word of thanks is due to Jerry and my nephew, Martin, each of whom contributed ideas relating to their specialist areas.

Part One

Gestalt Therapy

Its Beginning, Theory, and Techniques

1

Fritz Perls and Gestalt Therapy *The Beginnings*

Eleanor O’Leary

Fritz Perls, the originator of gestalt therapy, was born in Berlin in 1893. He lived in Germany, Holland, South Africa, the USA, and Canada. Psychoanalysis was his main therapeutic interest during his period in Europe. However, this was to change as his gradual disenchantment with the approach emerged. In New York in 1951 and 1952, together with Paul Goodman, Ralph Hefferline, and his wife Laura, he finally synthesized his earlier influences into a new paradigm, namely gestalt therapy. He eventually left the USA to found a gestalt community in Canada. He died shortly afterwards while presenting a workshop in Chicago in 1970.

Europe: Germany 1893–1933; Family Influences

Little is known of the family facts relating to Fritz Perls, a German Jew by birth. When he was three years of age, his family decided to move to a more fashionable neighborhood in Berlin. He referred to himself as “an obscure lower middle class Jewish boy” (Shepard, 1976, p. 1).

His mother (Amelia Rund) grew up in an Orthodox Jewish environment, while his father (Nathan Perls) was Grand Master in the Freemason Lodge. His father was quite reclusive in his habits. He had a room to which his meals were brought, and when he went out he did so alone. As a child, Fritz witnessed his father physically abusing his mother. Despite his parents’ strong religious beliefs, Perls (1972) declared, “I could not go along with this hypocrisy” (p. 59). Referring to his lack of belief in a higher power, Shepard (1976) stated, “He declared himself an atheist and remained one until the end” (p. 21). In his book *In and Out of the Garbage Pail*, Perls (1969a) proclaimed, “All religions

were man-made crudities, all philosophies were man-made fitting games. I had to take responsibility for myself" (p. 60).

Perls was the youngest of three children, two girls and one boy. His feelings for his two sisters could not have been more different, in that he loved Grete while he described Else, who later died in a concentration camp, as a clinger. Yet this observation of Else may not have been justified. Grete stated in Gaines (1979), "our sister, Else, would hang onto mother. She could not go by herself. No one knew until much later that she had congenital neo-blindness" (p. 2).

Although he hated his father's behavior, Perls considered his childhood to be a happy one. Grete and he were close companions as they played in the streets of Berlin. Swimming in the summer and ice-skating in the winter kept their young hearts joyful. The beginning of his interest in acting was encouraged in adolescence when an older neighbor, Theo Freiberg, invited him to participate in plays in their respective homes. They became a "company" (Shepard, 1976) that offered plays to neighboring communities with Theo as Director. This love of theater was further enriched when his mother took him to opera performances, while his mother's brother, Julius, brought warmth into his life.

A contradictory aspect in Perls' young life was the behavior of his uncle, Herman Staub, his mother's other brother, who Perls claimed was Germany's greatest legal theoretician. This uncle, the pride of the family, sexually abused Perls' friend, 13-year-old Lucy. Perls' (1972) words "All that facade of respectability" (p. 202) point to his disillusionment. Yet, despite his disapproval, he subsequently rationalized his own promiscuity by claiming that his uncle's behavior gave him a license for his own. Perls (1972) also recalled in his autobiography that a sentence from a lecture given by psychoanalyst Paul Federn made an impression on him, the sentence being "You cannot fuck enough" (p. 56). Yet it is worth recalling that personal responsibility for one's actions is one of the key concepts of gestalt therapy.

For someone who became famous in his adult life, his early reputation as a young scholar was poor, having failed seventh grade three times. This failure was in no small part due to his revolt against his anti-Semitic teachers. However, at age fourteen, circumstances altered his outlook when a teacher encouraged him to become involved in drama. Having already pursued drama as a child, there was a fortunate element of synchronicity in such encouragement. His participation in drama taught him the importance of the relationship between words and action.

After graduating from secondary school, Fritz began medical studies in Berlin. Due to an elongated heart, a stoop, and asthma, he was deemed to be medically unfit to serve in the German Army. However, after battles such as Verdun in 1916, where the Germans suffered 460 000 casualties, fitness standards were lowered, permitting Fritz to enlist. He served as a medical officer and experienced the horrors of trench warfare on the Western Front, including gassing. He suffered a minor head injury and also had to make hard decisions on the treatment of injured soldiers. He was promoted to sub-lieutenant in 1917. At the end of the war, he resumed his medical studies at the Frederick Wilhelm University in Berlin and qualified as a doctor in 1921. This was followed by training in psychoanalysis at

the Psychoanalytic Institutes in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Vienna. By the mid 1920s he had stopped communicating with his father.

One of the most significant events in Perls' life was his meeting in 1926 with Lore (Anglicized Laura) Posner, who later became his wife. He was successful in obtaining an assistantship with the gestalt physiological psychologist, Kurt Goldstein, at the Institute for Brain Damaged Soldiers where Laura was working. She had studied with the gestalt psychologists Kohler and Koffka at the University of Frankfurt, and with existential theologians Paul Tillich and Martin Buber.

Perls' (1972) description of his marriage in 1930 is surprising given his emphasis on self-responsibility. He commented, "At that time Lore pressed for marriage. I knew I was not the marrying type. I was not madly in love with her, but we had many interests in common and often had a good time" (p. 49). Furthermore, Laura (Gaines, 1979), referring to the description by Perls, stated, "It simply was not true. I never expected that he would marry me, or that he would marry at all. And I did not care. For more than three years before we were married I was his lover, and still I certainly did not press" (p. 8). A statement by Laura (Gaines, 1979) is particularly poignant: "I was so much in love with him, I gave everything to him, and he took it and kept on taking" (p. 20). For Perls, self-responsibility did not include fulfilling his own personal obligations.

Laura and Fritz had two children: a girl, Renate (born 1931), and a boy, Stephen (born 1935). Two years after Renate's birth, Fritz began speaking English (he was already fluent in French), although he was embarrassed by his German accent when speaking it. Fritz showered Renate with affection for the first four years of her life. He delighted in introducing her to everybody. His change in behavior, Perls (1969a) claimed, was due to being blamed for everything that went wrong – a reason that did not justify his withdrawal from a young child. His view of Renate is apparent in a statement he made in 1972, when Renate wrote to him with a picture of his grand-daughter, Leslie: "For once a letter without asking me for something, but I am sure the letter is an overture for a request that likely will come via Lore" (Perls, 1972, pp. 275–276). His son, Stephen, confirmed that Fritz did not appreciate what he called "leeching" – "Fritz was critical ... of my sister; he often felt that (she) was leeching on him" (Gaines, 1979, p. 93). His fondness for his grand-daughter, Leslie, can be seen in his description of her as a "cute and bright copperhead" with "something real about her" (Perls, 1972, p. 172). His treatment of Renate was not unlike that he displayed towards his sister, Else. Renate (Gaines, 1979) stated, "Fritz left me out of his whole life" (p. 17) – a sad conclusion for the daughter of someone who was to help so many in his lifetime.

His son, Stephen (Gaines, 1979), emerges as an even-handed and reasonable individual. His recollections give a first-hand picture of his relationship with Fritz. He stated, "My father was never angry; he was simply so busy with his own things. It was more just kind of a non-involvement that became part of my lifestyle" (p. 26). Speaking of his father's generosity, he stated, "Most of the time, Fritz was generous, but not *really*. It was a contest that we had throughout life. He was very generous with money if he were asked for it, but he would never offer it first" (pp. 109–110). Perls (1972) appeared to have no difficulty with regard to

generosity, stating that Stephen was “rather phobic and stubborn in asking and accepting any support” (p. 264). Stephen (Gaines, 1979) offered an explanation for his approach to Fritz with respect to money. He stated, “Takers annoyed him. So, by asking him for something I would wind up being a taker and he would have no respect for me” (p. 110). An interesting comment by Stephen is as telling of Laura as it is of Fritz, “Basically, I hated my father and his pompous righteousness, but he could also be loving and warm. How much my attitude was influenced by my mother’s hatred of him, how much she poisoned us children with it, I could not say” (p. 173). Yet there were good times in Stephen’s life as a young boy. Speaking of his youth in South Africa where he was born, he stated, “We took trips to the veldt area to look at the animals, or down to the ocean. But mostly I remember talking about my father, and him not being there. We had nice grass and grounds where we lived so I would bring my friends over occasionally” (p. 26). These excerpts covering some of Stephen’s thoughts portray Fritz as a non-involved parent who was generous with money when asked and whose son hated his pompousness but also saw his mother’s hatred of his father. For his part, Stephen concluded, “He is still father to me, though certainly not my image of what a father should be” (p. 275).

Having considered Fritz’s personal life, the next section will consider five main influences in the development of gestalt therapy, namely Freud, Reich, Friedlander, the gestalt school of psychology, and existentialism.

European Influences: Psychiatry, Psychology, and Psychotherapy

A large number of influences played important roles in the development of gestalt therapy. This orientation towards development was reinforced recently by Yontef (2005), who stated his preference for assimilating new possibilities into gestalt therapy, “I have not seen any framework which works better as an integrating framework for me as a psychotherapist than gestalt therapy” (p. 98). A valuable overview of the subject is Crocker’s (2005) statement that “Gestalt therapy is an example of the Aristotelian paradigm, a way of understanding that focuses upon concrete and specific individuals, situations, and events, seen in their environmental context, and attempts to understand the nature of change and how things – particularly living things – come to be as they are and to behave as they do. This is a marked contrast to the ... Platonic paradigm, which focuses on unchanging universal essences that are imperfectly exemplified in the changing world” (p. 66).

Freud

Perls met Freud for the first time in 1936 during a brief visit to Vienna from South Africa, to which he had immigrated in 1934. He described his relationship with Freud as polemic and stated in his autobiography “Freud, his theories, his influence are much too important for me. My admiration, bewilderment and vindictiveness