

Reflections on Field Theory

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COMMENTARY: The following is an edited version of a plenary lecture given at the 4th British Gestalt Conference in Nottingham in July 1990. I introduce the basic features and history of field theory and suggest that it provides a foundation for Gestalt therapy theory and practice. Five basic principles of field theory are explored. I then argue that the models of knowledge and knowing embodied in field theory form part of the emerging epistemology that characterizes many new areas of inquiry — e.g., holistic medicine and ecology. In the second half of the lecture I apply field theory thinking to a discussion of the "Self in Gestalt therapy and to the mutual effects on one another of two (or more) persons relating together. I focus on some new ways to think about the psychotherapy "field" of therapist and patient and end by discussing the importance of "presence."

Keywords: Field theory, Gestalt therapy, new epistemology, psychotherapy relationship, the Self, presence.

INTRODUCTION

The organizer of this conference, Ken Evans, invited me to talk about field theory, and I am glad to have had the opportunity to review this area. As Gary Yontef has said, field theory is "the least adequately discussed aspect of Gestalt therapy (and) ignorance of (it) seriously distorts the basic conceptual understanding of Gestalt therapy", (Yontef, 1981a). I agree with him.

My intentions today are, first, to lay out the principles of field theory as I understand them to be from the point of view of a Gestalt therapist. Second, I want to suggest that field theory thinking can be allied to the whole movement in thought which is taking place today, as reflected in, for example, ecology, holistic medicine, and many other alternative approaches which have reacted against the predominant assumptions of conventional science. Third, I will elaborate field theory thinking as it applies to a simple social unit — the two person system — and specifically the relationship between therapist and patient.

Gestalt "Maps"

We all know that "the map is not the territory" and in Gestalt work there are usually various applicable maps which we can refer to, in order to make sense of what we encounter in the territory. Confronted, say, with a young woman struggling to clarify her experience, or to release herself from knots of past confusion, there are alternative ways of characterizing or making sense of her experience and of the encounter. Thus, we may be thinking in terms of the balance between, on the one hand, support and, on the other, challenge or contact. This was a favourite map of Laura Perls.

An alternative map, the Gestalt experience cycle, was originally developed at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland (e.g., Zinker 1977) and recently expanded on by Petruska Clarkson (1989) in her welcome and useful new book. The map used here would make sense of the territory by portraying what is happening in the woman's experience as a sequence of steps in organismic self-regulation, as an unfolding gestalt in time.

There are many such maps in Gestalt therapy and as abstractions they are all potentially useful. And they can also trap us, if we use them too exclusively or without reference to others. (And of course there is variation in which ones we use at different times. For instance, I noticed that in my work in the weeks leading up to this lecture I have tended to bring into my therapeutic encounters outlooks which derive from field theory.)

In talking about field theory I am drawing your attention not to one particular map but to a whole section of the atlas. Arguably this section includes all the maps concerned with how the organism relates to the environment, and thus the needs cycle, organismic self-regulation, and the contact boundary and its

disturbances could all be depicted in field theory terms. However, the focus here will be the narrower one of drawing your attention to what field theory is and of exploring one particular area of application. My hope is that you will recognise that field theory fit not merely an abstraction, a set of ideas that exists in books and in the minds of a few theoreticians, but is the basis for a way of perceiving and knowing and understanding that can be assimilated, as it were, into our vision and sensibilities as working Gestalt therapists.

FIELD THEORY

Holism, Context, and the "Total Situation"

The maps of field theory depict well the territory of human beings in their contexts, i.e., of people in relationship, in community. The essence of field theory is that a holistic perspective towards the person extends to include environment, the social world, organizations, culture. The more assiduously we can navigate with the various field theory maps, the more we are likely actually to perceive and recognize the indivisibility of people from their surroundings and life situations.

"Field theory can hardly be called a theory' in the usual sense" (Lewin 1952, p. 45). Rather it is a set of principles, an outlook, a method and a whole way of thinking which relates to the intimate inter-connectedness between events and the settings or situations in which these events take place. So remember that "theory" in this case has a broad meaning, denoting a general theoretical outlook or way of appreciating reality.

The idea of "the field" comes from that of the electrical or magnetic field, itself originally a metaphor. What happens to something placed in this force field is a function of the overall properties of the field taken as an interactive dynamic whole. The field as a whole is also changed as a result of the inclusion of something new.

The early Gestalt psychologists latched on to this physical science metaphor, concerned as they were both with the phenomenology of perception and also with attempting to be scientifically respectable in an age where there was intense academic pressure to be so. They developed the electrical field metaphor to account, for instance, for their "Law of Pragnanz": this refers to the experience, when viewing something which is apparently random and meaningless (e.g., blotches of color), of its suddenly transforming into meaningful, recognizable form (e.g., a picture of a face). The slotting into place effect came to be explained as a correction of a disequilibrium in the perceptual field: "a grouping of certain forces ... operate upon a given form and only cease to transform it when the form has become stable," (Hartman, 1935, p. 48). Or, put another way, when the gestalt is completed, i.e., as a well formed, strong gestalt, the field comes into equilibrium.

While field theory is discussed in the writings of the early Gestalt psychologists, notably Kohler (1969), its foremost exponent was Kurt Lewin, a German Jewish academic refugee in North America, whose contribution to psychology is said by some to rival Freud's in its long-term impact on twentieth century psychology, (Marrow, 1969). Associated with his name are not only field theory but also action research, group dynamics, and sensitivity training. He is regarded as the founder of modern social psychology and a major influence on management training and organizational development, (Weisbord, 1987). A lot of people identify Lewin as a Gestalt psychologist, although — like Kurt Goldstein — he never described himself as such, despite having worked as a young man with Wertheimer, Kohler and Koffka.

Lewin's thinking has been vastly under-appreciated in Gestalt therapy. One of his most famous quotations is: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory", which I believe is what field theory is: good theory which, once understood, provides a very adequate conceptual language for all Gestalt practice.

The hallmark of field theory, in Lewin's words, is "looking at the total situation" (Lewin, 1952 p. 288), rather than a piecemeal, or item by item, or variable by variable analysis. Instead of reducing complex interactive phenomena to separate component parts, the overall picture or total situation is appreciated as a whole, with its wholeistic aspects recognized as such. There is a willingness to address and investigate the organized, interconnected, interdependent, interactive nature of complex human phenomena.

Obviously field theory is not the only theory or perspective with that kind of message. During the same period — the 1930s and 40s, in which Lewin was developing his ideas, general systems theory was also evolving (von Bertalanffy, 1968). This has grown into a formidable atlas of its own, with many well known applications — for instance to family therapy and in organizations. I intend to bypass the complex and at times obscure arguments which have taken place in *The Gestalt Journal* (see Latner, 1983 and ensuing issues) as to whether field theory or systems theory are compatible theoretically, and whether both can be equally valid within Gestalt therapy. The fact is that *both* approaches provide useful means of depicting complex phenomena holistically — that is, not treating them in isolation but in their contexts, situations, environments. Whichever approach is

followed, what is sure is that an outlook of broadly this kind is essential to the theory and practice of Gestalt therapy.

However, as between any two sets of maps, there are differences in emphasis and in details, and as a Gestalt practitioner my own preference certainly is for the field theory map rather than one based on systems theory, not least because the latter approach has been more widely over-simplified and mis-applied, and historically speaking represents a later importation into Gestalt theory and practice.

Five Principles of Field Theory

I intend today to recast field theory in the form of five principles or propositions which characterize this general way of perceiving and thinking about context, holism and process, and which lie at the very centre of our outlook and work as Gestalt therapists.

Before beginning I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness not only to Lewin and also Kohler, but also to Gregory Bateson (1979), and in the contemporary Gestalt world to Gary Yontef (1984) and Carl Hodges (1990), both of whom have helped me grasp the field theory outlook more fully. They are, of course, absolved from any inadequacies in the present account.

The five principles are as follows —

1. The Principle of Organization
2. The Principle of Contemporaneity
3. The Principle of Singularity
4. The Principle of Changing Process
5. The Principle of Possible Relevance.

(i) The Principle of Organization

Meaning derives from looking at the total situation, the totality of co-existing facts. Lewin writes:

Whether or not a certain type of behavior occurs depends not on the presence or absence of one fact or of a number of facts as viewed in isolation, but upon the constellation (the structure and forces) of the specific field as a whole. The 'meaning' of the single fact depends upon its position in the field. (Lewin, 1952, p. 150).

Everything is interconnected and the meaning derives from the total situation.

If, as I speak, a bomb exploded two or three hundred yards from this lecture room, there would be a major perturbation of the field. You would stop sitting here and I would stop lecturing. We would completely reorganize. 'Everything within this new framework would acquire a different meaning. This room might be reorganized into a temporary hospital, or a command centre for the emergency services, or a morgue. Properties of things are ultimately defined by their context of use. We might find we had to put chairs together to form temporary "beds" for injured people, tables might become stretchers. Meaning derives from their context of use in the "constellation ... of the specific field as a whole" (Lewin, 1952, p. 150). In other words, rather than thinking in terms of the enduring properties of objects which are held to be constant, their characteristics are defined by a wider organization of overall meaning, which "emphasizes interdependence" (ibid. p. 149).

Of course, for most of the time, the field as presently structured remains invariant: the lecture room retains its everyday functions as a lecture room, complete with usual expectations of how it will be used, of furniture, and of space. Fields, therefore, differ along a continuum of whether their organization is familiar or novel. On the one hand, functions may be embedded in bricks and mortar and architectural assumptions, on the other, structure can be newly thrown up, improvised for a present and transient purpose. Either

way, "structure" and "function" are not rigidly separated but are both attempts to convey qualities of the interrelated whole.

Let me say a word about randomness. As Gestalt therapists we know that much of what may appear random or inconsequential is in fact organized: that is, it is meaningful in some context of which we may be partially or completely unaware. If we notice a person scratching his or her knee, or tapping a little finger, or momentarily hesitating, we may sometimes draw attention to these apparently trivial and transient epiphenomena. We do so because we know from our experience that they are, more often than not, far from trivial: on further exploration they are found to be part of some greater schema, perhaps an unfinished situation in which impulses have been retroflected. The meaning of the small event is revealed as the wider context or total situation becomes clear. Behavior and phenomenal experience which are seen as part of the total field, or have been contextualized, are found to be organized, to have meaning.

(ii) *The Principle of Contemporaneity*

This principle points to the fact that it is the constellation of influences in the *present* field which "explains" present behavior. No particular special causal status is accorded to events in the past which, in many systems, are thought of as "determinants" of what is happening now. Likewise, future events, planned or fantasized, are not attributed special status as "goals" or "incentives" of what is seen to be occurring in the present.

Lewin points out that "the character of the situation at a given time" may include the past-as-remembered-now or the future-as-anticipated-now, which will form part of the person's experiential field in the present. Thus:

the individual sees not only his present situation, he has certain expectations, wishes, fears, daydreams for his future (ibid, p 53) as well, and such notions, along with his concepts about the past, constitute part of his present reality:

the psychological past and the psychological future are simultaneous parts of the psychological field at a given time. The time perspective is continually changing. According to field theory, any type of behaviour depends upon the total field, including the time perspective at that time, but not, in addition, upon any past or future field and *its* time perspectives (Lewin, 1952, p. 54, my italics.)

In short, it is not the *actual* events, past or future, which concern us because the actual field conditions at these other times are not present now.

We can notice here what a radically different conception of causality is implied from what is more general in our culture and in other varieties of psychotherapy. As Gestalt therapists, with our focus on present experience, we are not explaining phenomena by reference to past or future "causes". Instead, we concentrate on "what is" rather than "what was" or "what will be", not because we wish to ignore a person's history or her future intentions — say, her past sexual abuse or her plans to marry — but because our attention is directed, in the case of the abuse, primarily to how the abuse is being recollected or by-passed or made light of or magnified now; and, with her marriage plans, we are interested not so much in the plans themselves but in the whole way in which they form part of her present actuality, or — using another term of Lewin's — of her "life space".

Taking this example further, we can see that in the therapy itself, what also forms part of the present field is the person and presence of her therapist. The recollecting or anticipating (of the

past abuse and the future marriage respectively) are, therefore, taking place in a present day human context where there will be a greater or lesser degree of trust in the therapist, a lot of or little support offered, and where the therapist may have clear or unclear boundaries. These contemporary circumstances inevitably are part of the present field, and in turn will affect how the past or future are evoked — just as their present evocation in turn affects the total situation (perhaps the future course of therapy) as it subsequently evolves. Gestalt therapy, as a phenomenological approach, is thus looking at the actual present happenings within the therapy situation itself.

(iii) *The Principle of Singularity*

Each situation, and each person-situation field, is unique. As much as many psychologists would like to pretend otherwise, so (hat human behavior can be subsumed under normal science and generalized "laws" applied to explain behavior, our known, direct, personal experience is otherwise. Circumstances are never quite the same, and each of several persons inevitably has a different perspective or vantage point, even if they appear to be located in (he same time and place. We are all in this lecture room together, but our actual phenomenal experiences are all different. As we have observed many times in groups, what stands out as interesting or relevant for different people is varied in the extreme, relating to their background, current need, pervading present concerns and long-term unfinished business. Similarly each person listening to (or reading) what I am saying will be making different connections, taking in certain things and ignoring or side-stepping others. Meanings will be individually constructed and conclusions drawn which are not identical.

Generalizations are therefore suspect. They imply an order and predictability which is often not sustained by attention to "what is." It is often frustrating for newcomers to Gestalt therapy who want answers to such questions as "how do you work with anorexics in Gestalt?" when one painstakingly points out that there are no general procedures which derive from a fixed notion of anorexia; instead, the therapist will attend to the individual circumstances, the client's level of self-support, degree of awareness, time available, nature of resistances, urgency of present need, and ways the person interrupts contact, to mention a few of the many aspects of the total present situation which may influence what the therapist will attend to. The honouring of the singularity of each set of circumstances and each person requires, therefore, both respectfulness and also a willingness to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty. Generalizations — implying inherent similarity — an lead to premature or *a priori* structuring of reality perceived, which can easily lead in turn to finding in the present situation what one is looking for.

I am not implying that there are no continuities, similarities, and consistencies at all, nor that we would be sensible to avoid all the mass of theoretical generalization which exists in psychotherapy. However, if attention is concentrated on these, as it so often is, in an attempt to explain or account for something in terms of a comfortable seeming, lawful, and general truth, the actuality of the present situation may not be appreciated in all its specificity. As Lewin reminds us, we are always dealing with a "multitude of coexistent interdependent facts" as well as "conditions which influence behavior in one direction or the other" and we need an outlook and method which covers "the exceptional" as well as the "usual case", (ibid, pp. 150 - 51).

(iv) *The Principle of Changing Process*

This principle refers to the field undergoing continuous change: "one never steps in the same river twice." While the Principle of Singularity emphasized the need for unique perspectives for unique occurrences, the Principle of Changing Process refers to the fact that experience is provisional rather than permanent. Nothing is fixed and static in an absolute way.

Even with the same individual the field is newly constructed moment by moment — we cannot twice have an exactly identical experience. As William James (1905) pointed out: "It is obvious and palpable that our state of mind is never precisely the same ... When the identical fact recurs, we *must* think of it in a fresh manner, see it under a somewhat different angle, apprehend it in different relations from those in which it last appeared" (page 156).

"Timing is everything" is a therapeutic axiom in Gestalt work. We have all experienced occasions when a specific intervention made at a particular point seems exactly "right" (an aesthetic judgement), i.e., it is perceptible, appropriate, and useful for the client. Equally, we have all known times when interventions came a moment or two too late, when the experience of the individual or group has moved on and the intervention is, if anything, a distraction, or when an intervention is just a little premature, so that the client is deprived of making his own connection.

Considering the longer time frame of an ongoing relationship, there is the same necessity to stay "up to date". Reality unfolds in ways which can never be fully predicted, and what we thought *was* known, with certitude, may no longer apply. There is inherent and inevitable uncertainty as people adapt to new circumstances, accommodate to changes in their situation, and learn new ways to cope with ongoing problems.

Field theory thinking is thus relativistic. If the field is in flux, if our perceptions of reality are continuously being recreated, and the stability and equilibrium of the field reestablished moment by moment, there are obviously no absolute cut-off points (e.g., "here perception ends and projection begins") or fixed either/or dichotomies: ("either you are an assertive person or not"). Hard and fast distinctions come about as a result of conceptualizing and classifying, from the nature of language, not from phenomenal experience itself.

Appropriately, Gestaltists are wary of categories that effectively become permanent labels, and descriptions which become fixed definitions of the situation. Thus instead of dividing people, say, into "retroreflectors" and "non-retroreflectors", we rather think of retroreflecting as a process, and one in which we all engage at certain times, given certain circumstances. Even someone who retroreflects frequently does not always do so. As Lewin (1952, p. 242) points out:

A given state of a person corresponds to a variety of behavior and can be inferred only from a combined determination of overt behavior and the situation."

Let us, therefore, be wary of the tendency to systematize, make permanent, and fixate on categories and definitions. At the same time let us also be wary of creating a fixed gestalt or new dichotomy in which we "never use diagnostic categories".

(v) *The Principle of Possible Relevance*

This principle asserts that no part of the total field can be excluded in advance as inherently irrelevant, however mundane, ubiquitous, or apparently tangential it may appear to be. Everything in the field is part of the total organization and is

potentially meaningful. Gestalt therapists are interested in "the obvious", in rendering afresh what has become invisible and automatic, or is being taken for granted or regarded as of no relevance.

Thus, in therapy for example, an entrenched mannerism, way of moving, or style of speaking may be regarded, by most people including the client, as a "permanent" personal feature, a fixed characteristic, and thereby a given, and as something not relevant to the matter in hand. Yet, in Gestalt therapy and field theory nothing can be excluded *a priori* from the investigation.

If we take the analogy of looking critically at paintings which have been exhibited, it is as if the field theorist is not content just to look at the pictures in themselves but will be open, at least, to the possibility that the style of frames may play an important part in how the paintings are appreciated, or that the context of the exhibition as a whole provides a particular gloss on the nature of the pictures.

This openness to anything in the field is not a call for exhaustive inclusion in which each and every contributory influence within the person's or group's reality has to be accommodated. Not only would this be an impossibly infinite exercise, and geared to a static conception of the field, but it is unnecessary; the field is organized and what is most relevant or pressing is readily discoverable in the present. Instead of exhaustively documenting what is in the field, there is attention to what is momentarily or persistently relevant or interesting — and this will show how the field is organized at the moment. The point is, however, that the *range* of possible relevance is not restricted to some parts of the total field.

An example would be if a medical specialist gives a patient an explanation of his illness, the specialist herself may imagine that what is relevant for the patient is how clear she was in providing him with information. Yet suppose that what *actually* was most relevant (i.e., of present concern) was the degree of personal interest and warmth (or lack of it) the doctor communicated in the course of giving the information: this might be what is really organizing the field for the patient, not just the content of the information. Similarly, paying attention to a pre-arranged agenda without giving space to what arises in the moment may be persisted with because of a fixed criterion of what is relevant. The reality is that we have to be open to the present configuration of the field, whether anticipated or not.

One particular aspect, of the field may be so "invisible" that it is persistently overlooked as having any relevance: the presence of an observer. Yet the observer or commentator or investigator is always part of the total situation and cannot safely be excluded from it. In a similar way, in old style Gestalt therapy groups, the presence of a "hot seat" inevitably is a major part of the framing or context of what happens in the group. Likewise the presence of a video camera can profoundly affect the total situation. The Principle of Possible Relevance reminds us that taking into account the total situation requires doing just that.

WAYS OF KNOWING

The five principles laid out above are overlapping and not discrete. Rather they are five windows through which we can regard field theory, exploring its relevance in practice. In a sense, there should be no surprises: the principles are intrinsic to the

practice of Gestalt therapy, even if practitioners have not realised before that these insights could be described in field theory terms.

As a general outlook, a way of talking about and making sense of human experience, field theory attempts to capture the interrelated flow of unfolding human reality, impregnated as it is with our personal meanings and significance. Because we are, most of us, members of families, communities, social groups, organizations, it is also a vehicle for exploring ourselves in relationship. There is no sharp cut-off between "internal" and "external"; the unified field is the meeting place of the two.

Field theory, I have intimated, provides a way of appreciating reality. As such, as an overall system of knowing, it can be said to be an "epistemology" (Bateson, 1979; Berman, 1981) which is at odds with the general or prevalent epistemology of normal science, of present day academic and clinical psychology, and of many forms of psychotherapy other than Gestalt.

The Dominant Epistemology of our Time

What are taken for granted in many circles are a series of assumptions that are familiar to all of us, not least through the ways we have been educated. Thus, subjective experience is "unreliable"; repeatability of a phenomenon has to be established before it can be taken seriously; specific causes of events need to be isolated if the events are to be understood; complex problems have to be translated into variables, parameters, or component parts, in order to be studied systematically; quantitative knowledge outweighs qualitative knowledge; to be able to measure something is a giant step towards understanding it properly; success in rational argument is the supreme arbiter of differences in outlook; holistic thinking is vague and woolly; objectivity is dispassionate and politically neutral; and in virtually all matters striving to "be scientific" is highly commendable.

Such a condensed caricature is undoubtedly over-simple. "Knocking science" has also become fashionable and too easy (I have just typed these words into my word processor). Nevertheless, so powerful and pervasive is the dominant epistemology that ways of thinking which are based on a fundamentally different set of principles and assumptions - like field theory - have a hard time in becoming generally accepted, especially in circles which have a powerful investment in preserving the assumptions and outlooks of the epistemological *status quo*.

As has been well documented now, (e.g., by Capra, 1982, and Berman. *op. cit*), the dominant epistemology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries arose out of the scientific and philosophical revolution we associate with Galileo, Newton and Descartes.

Before this time, four or five hundred years ago and before the scientific era began, the epistemology in existence was very different, and was congruent with the social and economic system that existed at that time.

Before 1500 the dominant world view in Europe, as well as in most civilizations, was organic. People lived in small cohesive communities and experienced nature in terms of organic relationships, characterized by the interdependence of spiritual and material phenomena and the subordination of individual needs to those of the community ... (Capra 1982, p. 53).

This outlook was to change radically in the 16th and 17th centuries. In Capra's words: "the notion of an organic, living, and spiritual universe was replaced by that of the world as a machine, and the world-machine became the dominant metaphor of the modern era" (1982, p. 54). And with the machine metaphor came the conviction, first in philosophy, and then in psychology as it

materialised as an academic discipline, that human beings too could be regarded as machines, their actual personal experience set aside and discounted in favor of "objective measures" of behavior under laboratory conditions.

Part of what happened in this great shift was a reduction in the sense of how related and interdependent human beings were with one another and with nature. Berman says it eloquently:

The view of nature which predominated in the West down to the eve of the scientific revolution was that of an enchanted world. Rocks, trees, rivers, and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive, and human beings felt at home in this environment. The cosmos, in short, was a place of belonging. A member of this cosmos was not an alienated observer of it but a direct participant in its drama. His personal destiny was bound up with its destiny, and this relationship gave meaning to his life. This type of consciousness — "participating consciousness" — involved ... identification with one's surroundings and bespeaks a psychic wholeness that has long since passed from the scene. (1981, p. 16).

So we can begin to see how the epistemology which field theory represents has a long pedigree; at least, in some ways it matches the more "primitive" and natural outlook of the distant past in which dualism was, if not absent entirely, certainly not as profound a split as it has become over the last three to four hundred years. "Participating consciousness" is a fine alternative way of describing the unified field in which there is no hard and fast division between observer and what is observed, subject and object.

Berman describes the "disenchantment" that attended the rise of a more dualistic outlook.

The story of the modern epoch, at least on the level of mind, is one of progressive disenchantment... Scientific consciousness is alienated consciousness; there is no ecstatic merger with nature, but rather total separation from it. Subject and object are always seen in opposition to each other. I am not my experiences, and thus not really a part of the world around me. (1981, p. 16).

The field theory outlook re-introduces the sense of a unified whole in which subject and object cease to be in opposition: my experiential field includes the meanings I find in my environment; to speak of the setting or milieu having an independent and objective reality, separate from my or other's experiences of it, is to create a conceptual entity necessary perhaps for the kind of science that came about, and the "machine world" which it gave rise to, but not accurately describing the phenomenal nature of actual human experiencing. Moreover, the change to dualism was not altogether healthy. As Berman notes:

The logical end point of this world view is a feeling of total reification, everything is an object, alien, not-me, and I am ultimately an object too, an alienated "thing" in a world of other, equally meaningless things. This world is not of my own making, the cosmos cares nothing for me, and I do not really feel the sense of belonging to it. (1981, p. 16)

R. D. Laing made a similar point: that as a result of several hundred years of increasing scientific influence upon our basic ways of appreciating reality, much of what is intrinsic to human life (with a capital L) has been lost:

Out go sight, sound, taste, touch and smell and along with them has since gone aesthetics and

ethical sensibility, values, quality, form; all feelings, motives, intentions, soul, consciousness, spirit. Experience as such is cast out of the realm of scientific discourse. (In Capra, 1982, p. 55).

To summarize: with the growth of the scientific outlook of mechanization, and the importance given to quantitative approaches, objectivity, and rationality, came a fundamental separation between the world as I naturally experience it and "the world as it really is" (supposedly), i.e., as it is described by science. And it is this separation, or alienation as Berman calls it, that has become enshrined in the dominant epistemology of today and which field theory, coming from a totally different perspective, stands in contrast to.

New Directions

Well, it is worth acknowledging that the dominant epistemology is now under attack from many quarters, not just from field theorists. All acknowledge that what Donald Schon (1988) calls "technical rationality" has indeed been stupendously successful in promoting the machine world.

Yet it is now found wanting by many—including ecologists, modern physicists (in the aftermath of relativity and quantum mechanics), holistic medical practitioners, community architects, alternative economists and many others, including Gestalt therapists.

Indeed, we live at a time of unprecedented activity and innovation, in which new thinking is being applied to many areas of science and human effort. There are moves towards more holistic approaches, more relativistic outlooks, and there is more reflexivity regarding the role of the observer; interdependent relationships are more widely acknowledged, and the limitations of applying mechanical-type thinking to areas way beyond engineering are more frequently acknowledged. (See Capra, 1982, for an early discussion of what he calls "the rising culture").

Specifically, as the old epistemological framework begins to break up, and the whole intellectual and cultural climate continues to shift, we can expect changes in conventional psychiatric practice as well as in much psycho-analytically derived therapy. I imagine that the tendency of others to re-invent Gestalt therapy will continue. Others will be joining a train on which Gestalt therapists have been travelling for many years. What I am saying is that many of the assumptions and working beliefs intrinsic to Gestalt therapy—like holism and organismic self-regulation and present-centredness, all of them woven together in the field theory outlook—are being independently discovered and the thinking of people like Lewin acknowledged for being ahead of their time. The Gestalt movement has an important part to play in the emerging new era.

FIELD THEORY IN PRACTICE

In this overview of field theory I have sought to convey that it is a far ranging and useful outlook. So far my remarks have been general. Now it is time to be more specific.

Having discussed field theory as a perspective for Gestalt therapy, we need first to consider what view of the "self" is compatible with this perspective. From there I shall discuss the idea of co-creation of a joint field by two parties or two selves, and this leads naturally into discussion of the one-to-one therapeutic relationship.

The Self

In Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1973), the self is "the system of contacts at any moment ... the self is the contact boundary at work. Its activity is the forming of figures and grounds" (page 281). Joel Latner (1986) refers to the self as "our essence, (the self) is the process of evaluating the possibilities in the field, integrating them, and carrying them through to completion in the cause of the organism's needs ... the self works for its completion ... the self is us-in-process" (p. 38 - 39). And to quote Goodman again - the "self is the integrator ... the artist of life" (Perls, *et. al.* p. 282). Perhaps the best phenomenological description of the self which I have heard is attributed to Sonia Nevis: "The self is the quivering mass of our potential".

Hunter Beaumont (1990) has suggested that it would help enormously if we took over the German practice and used the word "gestalt" not only as a noun and adjective but also as a verb. Thus, to *gestalt something* is to create or constellate it into a patterned whole, to make something into a configuration. I intend to follow this practice and to use gestalt as a verb as well as a noun.

Using the language of field theory—and again I am indebted to Hunter Beaumont for this—we can think of the self as being *that which constellates the field*. This is a different definition of the self, but compatible with others given here. How do I frame my reality at a particular moment? How do I arrange my "life space?" How do I organize my experience? I do these by constellating or organizing (or configuring) the field according to particular meanings, a personal process in which certain parts of my total experience become figural and other parts are organized around them, as ground. And this process can be construed as the self at work or, in Latner's phrase, "us-in-process." The self is therefore (as in all Gestalt theories of the self) definitely a process and not a static abstract mental entity; it provides a way of describing an ongoing, evolving and transforming process in which we continuously engage—configuring the experiential field, or choosing our reality.

Two Persons, Two Selves

So what happens when there are two people, relating together and both constellating their fields at the same time? Instead of thinking only of two separate phenomenal fields, let us acknowledge that when two people converse or engage with one another in some way, something comes into existence which is a product of neither of them exclusively. What happens between them is a function of both together. It is a *co-created* reality (Beaumont 1990) which potentially includes all that is in the experiential fields or life-spaces of each of the two participants but is not simply the two sets of experiences added together. Rather, there is a shared field, a common communicative home, which is mutually constructed.

How is this shared reality brought into being? Well, if two individuals sit silently staring at one another, as happens in many a dentist's waiting room, the space between them is going to remain undifferentiated and unformed and there will be very little shared reality. At best the space will be filled with miscellaneous projections and guesses, untested assumptions and unacknowledged stereotypes. If there is some eye contact, if there are exchanges of words or facial expressions made to one another, if there are the beginnings of communicating and connecting, the space between them starts to come alive. In one of Fritz Perls' talks (1969) he says:

we begin to understand (hat people ... can communicate with each other

by creating what he calls the

Mitwelt — the common world which you have and the other person has.

He goes on:

You notice if people meet, they begin the gambit of meeting — one says, 'How are you?' 'It's nice weather.' And the other answers something else. So they go into the search for the common interest, or the common world, where they have ... communication and togetherness, where we get suddenly from the *I* and *You* to the *We*. So there is a new phenomenon coming, the *We* which is different from the *I* and *You*. The '*We*'... is an ever-changing boundary where two people meet. And when we meet (here, then *I* change and you change, through the process of encountering each other (ibid. pp. 6 - 7).

Or, to quote Carl Hodges (1990), "Contact organizes the field" and the shared reality, the relationship, begins to take shape.

We can use the analogy of dance: two dancers come together; both have available (potentially) all of their previous dancing experience throughout their lives, probably including exposure to different outlooks and teachings; and each dancer has a repertoire of preferred sequences, movements, rhythms, or dance steps. One might

like to leap in the air a lot, the other to move very slowly; one might like to work on the ground, the other to keep moving at all costs. They create a dance together which is a product of two creativities, and the gestalt qualities of their dance — and as watchers of it, our aesthetic satisfaction with it — will depend on the quality of their interaction, how well they connect.

When they begin, the shared field or common reality is unformed and undifferentiated. With contact, with engagement or interaction, the field begins to be structured. A few steps are taken and this sets a precedent. It is a bit like the abstract expressionist painter who places one splotch of paint in the middle of an empty canvas. This begins to structure the field, begins to organize that particular reality. The second application of paint has to be in relationship to the first. And as the painter adds new splotches, the opportunities to do something totally different become more difficult. There are fewer degrees of freedom. The field has become formed, it has been gestalted.

As a field gets progressively more differentiated, more organized, more structured, the inevitable turn-about occurs when the field itself, as it were, begins to determine what happens next, the creative possibilities for the painter, the dancer, the parties to the relationship, are now dependent in part on what has gone before. The principle applies widely: we shape our lives, our attitudes, our homes, our careers, our characters, our organizations, and in turn they come to shape us. The more fixed the configuration of the field at any one time, the harder it becomes to dissolve the existing pattern or to do something entirely novel or outside it. We all know the power of precedent, of habit, and of repetition, and the difficulty — even terror — which can attend the process of undoing the fixed configuration, the fixed gestalt.

So the self is the gestalting function, the creating of our individual life-space in the moment, the constructing of our

personal reality. Two individuals, relatively free of neurosis, can approach the creation of a shared reality with a lot of creativity available. The dance, the co-created gestalt, can be fun, can be play.

Suppose, however, that one or both parties to this activity have particularly stereotyped ways in which they configure their field, so that the gestalt formation process or the constellating itself has become fixed, what happens then? Suppose a man approaches a woman rather as if he has filters in his eyes — perhaps the particular distorting spectacles which result in his regarding women as being like his mother or a former school teacher, (very rare occurrences, as we know!) In such cases he is introducing into the co-created mutual field a significant element of inflexibility. (Another, more familiar way of mapping this process would be to speak of there being a disturbance at the contact boundary, that of projection.)

To stay with the analogy of dancing, when the contacting process is disturbed in this way by one party, the dance between the two dancers is inevitably affected. Thus, suppose that whenever she dances in a particular way or has a certain expression, he perceives her — because of his projection, his fixed mode of configuring — as being critical, or as needy, or as flirtatious or whatever the overall meaning is that he is making, he will then dance with her *as if* she is critical, needy, or flirtatious, irrespective of what her experience actually is or how she is configuring her reality of being with *him*. Dancing with her in this particular way, he will be moving, perceiving, and reacting in ways that go with his particular way of configuring the field and differently than if he was seeing her in another way — say, as creative, strong, aggressive. Given that her reality of him and of the dancing is governed in part by how he is dancing with her, her own dance will naturally be influenced. The dance, the communal event, will be biased in a direction of being fixed and stereotypic, even if only one party to it is configuring his or her field in a self-limiting way.

We Help Create Other's Realities

The idea, that through creating a mutual field each of us is helping to create others' realities, is one to ponder. It obviously has significance for what we do as practicing psychotherapists. It also raises wider questions to do with the practice of being communal.

In a recent edition of *The Gestalt Journal*, Raymond Saner (1989) has commented upon the cultural bias of Gestalt in an article where he refers to "Gestalt Therapy Made-in-USA". He refers to the particular bias of overdone individualism "a super valuing of taking care of myself, of individual identity, of emotional independence", and what he calls a "calculative" involvement with organizations. In contrast there have been undervaluations of the opposite poles — of taking care of the community or the environment, of a "we" consciousness, of a recognition of our personal dependence on organisations, and of our moral involvement with them.

Saner, in this important paper, stresses the need for a corrective, away from what Beaumont (1990) has called the "I am who I am and if you do not like it, fuck off" ideology which has characterized some Gestalt therapy and writing. Saner's assumption is that most members of the American Gestalt therapy movement have over-stressed I-ness because they are unaware of their cultural predisposition toward individualism with its corollary, aversion or avoidance of lasting intimacy or committed 'we'-ness (1989, p. 59).

(Of course, confining this cultural bias to the USA may be too restrictive. Also, there are other possibilities: for instance that the individualistic bias may have been a consequence of Fritz Perls' own style, Yontef 1991).

Saner argues that it is partly because of this cultural bias that Lewin's work and field theory thinking has not been adequately assimilated into Gestalt therapy theory. Taking a field theory perspective highlights inter-connectedness, mutuality, and co-influence. Quoting Lewin: "(Human interaction is) ... as much a function of the person as the person is a function of the situation". Saner goes on:

the therapeutic situation is characterized by therapist and patient interacting and co-influencing each other simultaneously, continuously, and consistently (1989, p. 61).

This statement reinforces the point made at the beginning of this section, that we help to create others' realities through the creation of a mutual field. Its implications are many, and they are radical for the practice of psychotherapy generally.

Thus, any suggestion that the therapist can act more or less as if he is an objective observer, "merely" an interpreter of what is going on in therapy, without being a full participant, becomes highly suspect.

I recall many years ago being interviewed by a sociologist who prided herself on how "scientific" and "objective" she was. She asked questions in as near a robotic monotone as possible and showed no flicker of expression as I answered them. She did not want to "introduce bias" or to "influence my response in one direction or another." The effect was that I completely dried up. There is no interviewer-proof interview, and from a field theory perspective there cannot be. My interviewer was immured in the old epistemology and was still operating with its flawed assumptions about objectivity and value-free science.

Similarly, I would argue, attempts by psychoanalysts to "ring fence" (to use a banking term) the entire therapy relationship, setting boundaries so inflexibly that, for instance, there is no talking if they bump into one another in the street, and no self-disclosure on the part of the therapist except in extreme circumstances, are just as absurd as the sociologist's attempt to keep herself from influencing me. The analyst's patient, responding to the total field, to all the circumstances, cannot be but affected by them; "no talking" is therefore as significant a message as is talking more naturally. This is not meant to imply that boundaries are unimportant — they help to structure the mutual field in ways that can offer safety and build trust. But a case could be made that the hypothetical analyst in these circumstances, by following a theoretical outlook that objectifies the patient and ignores the field conditions of therapy, is acting out a form of fundamental disrespect, modelling distance, artificiality, and inauthenticity.

Ignoring the Obvious

Before we turn all our criticism outside, there is a corresponding tendency among some Gestalt therapists and trainers — probably all of us sometimes — to discount certain aspects of the total situation in which we are engaged, again *as if*, or on the assumption, that they do not matter. At times when we do this we are ignoring what I called the Principle of Possible Relevance and it shows that we have not fully assimilated the field theory perspective.

In our collective history, there are many examples of bypassing significant factors in the total situation. In the Sixties it was not unknown for certain trainers to have sexual relationships with different group members during the life of a training group, and this was known about by group members, and yet was never actually addressed, acknowledged, and discussed in the group itself. I do not wish to minimize the ethical issues, nor the potentially adverse effects on the women involved, which such practices involved. But for the moment I want simply to point out the absurdity of believing that such unacknowledged encounters did not affect the total, mutually created reality, the life of the group, in very significant ways. What I have heard, from members of such a group — and it is not surprising — is that the group was felt as *in* unsafe, distressing environment. (We see here (the triumph of individuality over communality, in fact (he blatant disregard for the wider effects on the community of following a private agenda. As we well know, individual actions rarely fail to have wider consequences and ripple effects which affect others in our families, groups, and communities.)

Another example of ignoring aspects of the total situation refers to the continuing widespread persistence, within some quarters of Gestalt therapy, to pursue a style of group leading in which group process work is deliberately excluded. Instead, the trainer or therapist works with individual members of the group sequentially and there is no time given to addressing what is happening concurrently in the life of the group as a whole. There are even trainers who openly acknowledge that group process issues are important and they still do not address them.

Again, in these situations, it is as if some of the field is regarded simply as a "given", taken for granted and assumed to be irrelevant or at least not important enough to spend time examining. It reminds me of medical specialists who argue that the form of medical treatment itself is what is important while other aspects of the patient's reality, other parts of the total field, like the hospital context, or the attitude of doctors, or the catering, are of little relevance to the patient's progress and not worth paying much attention to, some maybe but not much. Yet field theory reminds us, first, that people are affected by the total experience, by the whole context of the activity as well as by the activity itself; and, second, that people's total reaction is to the entire reality, not to piecemeal aspects of it. The concept of the unified field means that all the various interdependent influences act together: people respond to a unified field, not to isolated features or separate factors: these are, ultimately, only concepts.

So it is with groups — the advertising, the method of selection, the room in which it is held, the relationships of leaders to one another, the boundaries established, the opening remarks, the perceived collective history of the group, all these may (and do) sometimes affect the overall lives of groups, not as single one-off influences but as part of the interdependent whole. If the field theory perspective has been fully understood and integrated into practice, then all aspects of the total situation are open, as it were, to scrutiny and experiment.

The Therapeutic Field

As individuals, then, who are also inevitably in relationships and communities of one kind or another, we experience a two-way process: we have effects on our relationships and communities and we are also affected by them. We help create or organize the mutual reality or shared field and in turn are created and organized by it. Reciprocal influencing of this kind, as we have seen, has important implications for professional practice.

A particularly provocative idea for therapists follows from the notion of reciprocal influence, namely that change in the client may be achieved by the therapist changing her or himself. Since it is a co-created field, a function of what the therapist brings to it as well as what the client brings, a change in the way the therapist acts or feels towards his client and inter-relates with him, will affect the mutual field and have consequences for the client. The extent of what is possible via this route is obviously difficult to assess. But it strongly endorses the idea that in the impeccable practice of Gestalt therapy there has to be a central place for continuing supervision, as well as daily attention to our fitness-to-practice.

More generally, the implication is that in order to become better therapists, we need to become more evolved beings — not simply by being more aware, not even by being more aware of our patterns of becoming unaware at times, but by allowing what Yontef (1988, p. 31) calls a fundamental "phenomenological attitude (to) permeate ordinary life", effectively as a way of being-in-the-world.

In this sense, I wish to argue, Gestalt therapy is not something we simply use, like some suit of clothes we temporarily put on and then leave off. It is not just a bunch of techniques, nor is it some kind of therapeutic equipment that we wheel on for a particular clinical purpose and then substitute with another kind of equipment shortly after for another purpose. If we choose to work with the

Gestalt discipline, we find the ways of thinking and perceiving that characterize the approach filtering through into our lives and relationships. If we are to act congruently and authentically as therapists, we have to acknowledge that the way we are and the way we live cannot be entirely separated from our work as professional Gestalt therapists. Everything in our own phenomenal field becomes part of the matrix from which we co-create fields with others. And when there is clarity of our own present field, a minimum of distracting unfinished business, and good self-support, the greater the likelihood of our dancing creativity and centredness being available in our interactions with others.

The Therapeutic Dance

Another implication of field theory thinking, already touched upon, relates to how the "gestalting function" itself can become stereotypic: the field of an individual or group can be configured in a fixed, familiar, yet often self-damaging way.

An example might be that an individual client may be attempting to construct the shared field or total situation in such a way that the other, the therapist, fits into his/her stereotyped expectations, fits the bill, fits the cut out role the client wants to create. If I am the therapist, I need, therefore, to be aware of what is happening, and to recognize what "dance" I am being invited to participate in. Provided that I notice what is happening, I can choose how I respond - whether to bend or to stand firm against, to comment or not, to decline gracefully or to accept for the time being the role I am being asked to play.

Of course, the reality of the client also changes constantly: there is not one configuration of the field on offer, so to speak, the field is constantly being re-configured. There may be many different dances. In the course of an hour's encounter the person may be a young, plaintive child, an oppressed manager re-enacting a work situation, a strong adolescent remembering leaving home, or someone negotiating with the therapist regarding vacation dates and fees. These different configurations of the field represent

different states of being: involving perhaps shifts in the person's body positions, voice, thinking patterns, and mode of relating to me, as therapist; these all may change with each different "dance sequence". And I need to recognize these shifts and also the fact that I'm witnessing varied "selfings" (or selves).

These different states of being correspond in some ways to ego states in transactional analysis or to sub-personalities in psychosynthesis (Rowan, 1990). The point is that with each kind of dance, with each way of configuring the field, the reality that is set up by the individual and which includes me as the therapist, is calling for my adopting a different part of *myself* (Beaumont 1990). Thus, I can be, as it were, created as a "persecutor" by someone who has a paranoid way of constellating his or her field or (by others) as a "potential helper", or as an "expert who will tell me what to do." Of course, if I am aware of what is happening, I am more likely to avoid the confluence in constellating my field in the way expected of me.

Petruska Clarkson (1989) spoke at a previous Gestalt conference about the different relationship patterns that can occur in therapy. She described them in terms of the family archetypes. For instance, as a therapist, I can be grandparently, or I can relate to my client as a sibling, or in a fatherly or motherly way. These are some of the ways I can be. The implication I am drawing is that each of these represent different mutual constellations of the field which, in or out of awareness, I am co-creating with my client.

So whether I am cast in the role of, or play the part of, patient listener, or of confronter and limit-setter, or of supportive presence, I am inextricably part of the dance, part of the co-created field, the common interpersonal home.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Today I have examined with you some of the maps that relate to field theory, and attempted to show you that Gestalt therapy is rooted in the particular perspectives that characterize field theory. The more this connection is made, the more will Gestalt therapy be seen as truly a *contextual* therapy. In particular I have concentrated on how attending to the "between" in relationships, and the co-influencing, interactive nature of the dance between people, can make us see therapeutic work in a fresh light.

In this final section, I want to focus on several themes which go even further into the issue of how we may affect others and be affected by them. In so doing I am going to touch on issues that are rarely addressed in Gestalt therapy but in my view need to be. Some can be fairly easily integrated with field theory thinking as described earlier. Others, however, while dealing with the "in between", go beyond the realms of conventional thinking, and embrace "fringe" concerns of a kind which are regularly and casually dismissed by medical and scientific establishments. I believe that Gestaltists need to be open to areas of enquiry which delve into phenomena that have often been noted and anecdotally reported but which happen to fall outside the realm of "respectable" science or at least do not seem to have a simple explanation. Let me give some examples.

First, I am often amazed by how parallel realities and processes become established. For instance, in supervision it very easily can happen, and frequently does, that what is happening in the therapy situation under discussion gets re-enacted and played out in the supervision session itself. Thus, the therapist/supervisee may be unduly passive *vis-a-vis* his patient and suddenly the supervisor

becomes aware of his own passive response to the supervisee. Such phenomena are well known, and often are attributed to "unconscious processes" by those who speak of the unconscious. But how does Gestalt therapy treat such parallelisms? Well, it seems possible to think of the co-produced field getting configured in a certain pattern, and this becoming transferred to another location/ time period, perhaps (in the supervision) through there being common features in the two situations. This is, of course, no more an explanation than is reference to the unconscious, but it may provide a more fruitful descriptive starting point. And we may see here, in miniature, the same process — involving wholesale transfer of field-configurations — as may occur when skills, attitudes, and fashions spread very rapidly across the globe, or when an "atmosphere" in an organization is communicated very quickly throughout it¹.

Second, there is the phenomenon whereby over a particular time period — say during the course of a week — patients seem all to be raising similar issues that happen to be those with which the therapist is also currently concerned in her or his own life. At the time when a relative of mine was dying of cancer, there were so many references to cancer by my patients that I lost any sense of surprise. I almost came to expect patients to mention cancer, or to report knowing somebody with it, and they did, far more than I could have expected by chance, and without any prompting by me at all. But did I "prompt" them in some other way than talking about cancer? Was there some subtle mutual configuring of the shared field in which I was myself implicated, that led to a greater chance of certain issues being evoked? Do we influence others around us by what we are thinking about? Difficult though the issues are to research, they deserve to be carefully examined, if necessary by other than usual methods of research (e.g., co-operative enquiry. Reason, 1989).

Third, there are often informal references made about how young children, especially at a pre-verbal stage, can "pick up" the emotional tone and unspoken feelings of their parents and home life. Surely what must be happening here is some overall sensory/feeling reaction to the overall, holistic quality of the total field². Yet how little investigation has there been, particularly by Gestaltists, of such phenomena. Likewise, casting the net further out, there are numerous anecdotal references to animals anticipating danger in advance of the danger arriving. Such phenomena may not be understood — they are not, at least in any mainstream way — but, recognizing the full extent of organism/environment interaction, and the extraordinary number of ways in which we are influenced by our surroundings, perhaps we should, as practical field theorists, at least be inquisitive, and more open to examining such phenomena. The writings of Jung, for instance on synchronicity (e.g., Jung, 1952), discuss these various kinds of experience, and — without giving up the earthy groundedness of the Gestalt tradition — Gestalt therapists might well become more open to talking about, and documenting, some of these phenomena.

Fourth, more directly evocative of field theory, with its "field of forces" physical science metaphor, are suggestions that there exist actual electromagnetic and energy fields around and between humans; there are those who claim they can see auras; and acupuncturists, Shiatsu specialists, and complementary medical practitioners of many different types take very seriously notions of energy flow and the power of healing from another person. I will not stray into the controversies that these raise between complementary and orthodox medicine (Fulder, 1988; Staeker and

Gilmour, 1989) but simply say that the questions about the effects of human beings on one another form one part of the debate.

Following from this, I suspect that many of us may have had the experience of being markedly affected simply by being in the presence of someone with a highly developed consciousness, perhaps a spiritual teacher or even someone who simply meditates a great deal. And this raises the question of our own presence, as therapists. Sometimes I think that the most important function we can have as therapists is to be fully present, to be clear, to be "all there." to attend fully with an uncluttered consciousness. Even if the client is not in contact with me or with her own process, I can at least remain in contact with her and with my needs, feelings, and thoughts. Arguably, simply by being fully present, we are already helping to constellate the mutual field in a life-enhancing way. And being "fully present" is, of course, another way of talking about "presence."

Joseph Zinker (1987) has written about presence and I am impressed by what he says. I will therefore finish by quoting him at some length.

Presence (he writes) hints at that special state of being fully here with all of oneself, one's body and soul. It is a way of being with, without doing to. Presence implies being here fully — open to all possibilities ... The therapist's presence is *ground* against which the *figure* of another self (or selves) can flourish, brighten, stand out fully and clearly.

For the client, for the other, "the therapist's intrinsic-being-here stimulates stirrings in the deeper parts of one's own self." He goes on:

When I experience another's presence, I feel free to express myself, to be myself, to reveal any tender, vulnerable parts, to trust that I will be received without judgment or evaluation. My therapist's presence allows me to struggle with my own inner conflicts, contradictions, problematic questions, paradoxes — without feeling distracted by leading statements or overly determined questioning. My therapist's presence allows me to confront myself, knowing that I have a wise witness.

Zinker goes on to say what presence is *not*:

Presence is not a way of posturing or self-conscious posing or strutting before another. Presence is not style. Presence is not charisma. Charisma asks for attention, admiration. Charisma calls to itself, while presence "calls to the other." Charisma is a figure competing with another figure, while presence is ground, "asking to be written on." Presence is not posed religious humility (which is really a form of secretive pridefulness). Presence is not polemic, it does not take sides, it sees wholes. Presence does not compete. Presence is not flamboyant or dramatic.

And to conclude. Zinker discusses the development of presence. "Sometimes", he writes,

therapists have appeared who simply always had presence. They seem to have been born that way. (However) most people acquire presence through the continual pounding of time, time which reminds them again and again how much there is to learn and how little they know. Presence is the acquired state of awe in the face of an infinitely complex and wondrous universe.

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Notes

1 For readers familiar with the revolutionary biological ideas of Rupert Sheldrake (1987), involving 'morphic resonance', there are some intriguing overlaps with field theory thinking, including the phenomena mentioned here, of transfer of complex patterns of behavior and experience.

2 Some evidence that young infants respond to the holistic qualities of the total field is emerging within a small-scale research project, directed by the author, which is investigating the long term effects of having participated in the Second World War as an infant. It appears that while few, if any, 'conscious' memories may be available to the adult looking back, there may be 'preconscious' memories of the original experiences of the wartime situation, in the form of diffuse and non-specific feeling states. It may well be that both mother and child may have had similar overall reactions at a feeling level to the shared field conditions of the time, including the atmosphere and public mood at that point in history, but that while the mother may have had all sorts of ways of coping and self-managing, the child did not, and simply responded to the prevailing climate, ethos, or atmosphere of war in which she/he was immersed. Early findings suggest that the felt reactions of those born in similar extreme circumstances (e.g., in London in 1940 — 1944) may be strikingly similar, along with the long-term effects.

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