

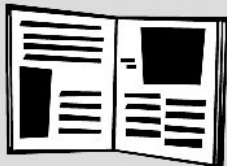


Gestalt NEWS Foundation

Informative and communicative six-month issue of Gestalt Foundation Psychotherapy & Training Center • July 2009 • 10th issue



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Those of you who wish to contribute to future issues are most welcomed! Please contact Gestalt Foundation's secretariat office: Telephone: 2310 283588 or 210 7254010.

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Express your interest in participating or simply share with us your opinion or ideas!

We are always interested in hearing from you!

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IN ORGANIZATIONS**

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One picture, a thousand words, ten issues, a decade... I decided to let pictures do the talking in this editorial. This artistic creation by our new graphic artist (welcome, Sophia!) is composed of all the photographs we used in these ten issues of GFNews!

Instead of carrying out a monologue, I called upon my associates and fellow founders of the Gestalt Foundation to talk about this journey to our here and now!

You can find us in the central pages of this issue. The remaining pages complete the homage to the 10th anniversary of the Gestalt Foundation, with comments from activities and events celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Gestalt Foundation.

Happy Reading, and On We Go!
Andonia Konstandinidou

A different description of Gestalt Foundation!

The following imaginative, exuberant text emerged from our request to Anastassis to write something for the booklet we prepared for our 10th anniversary. After debating and discussing, we decided not to include it for reasons of policy. We also decided not to deprive the Gestalt Foundation community of this creative, spontaneous expression. Enjoy it!

Gestalt...(Guest Alt! Alt?! What's **Fritz** on about? Are we under German occupation? No? Then what's this all about?)
 An invitation to...pay attention...to **cognizance**, to see what you **need** (that's better!) An invitation to...a party (There will be dancing! How can I **move** lying this deep into the couch?)
Contact...(there are other people here, too! I'm freaking out, let's go to the buffet for a nibble)
Contact with Cognizance of the need (that's right, otherwise I'll become obese!...I'll dance and have **fun**...Boy, is there **food** to be had...for later...OK)
 In the **Here and Now**...Be my guest (...Special Guest...Official Guest...like, a "VIP"...hey, **Perls**, you're the greatest....."**VIP**")
 ...The answer to the invitation ... (is each and every person's...**Responsibility** and **Choice**)

Sincerely!
Anastassis Mavromichalis
Alumnus of the Gestalt Foundation

THE GESTALT THERAPIST through time

Common presentation
4th year of Thessaloniki

Even mentioning the word "time" in Gestalt practice automatically makes one think of the "here and now", the only time when we can all be in touch with our sensory perceptions, be responsible for our choices and our avoidances, the only time when we can imagine and dream.

Before examining the here and now, perhaps we should look at the "there and then" of Gestalt's 'childhood'. The story of Gestalt is closely linked to the life of its creator, F. Perls. Perls was a German of Jewish descent who had finished his studies in psychiatry and began his professional career as a psychoanalyst. He was a genius, a subversive and rebellious therapist who escaped the Nazis, living and working in Africa during the earliest years of his career. It was no accident that he focused more on the differences between people than the similarities and passionately defended

the right to being different. Living among the citizens of South Africa, he developed ideas that were unprecedented for European and American standards. Obviously it was Perls himself who was different.

At that age, society was governed by science, mechanics, medicine and neurology. Psychotherapy was born and the genius Freud laid the foundation for psychoanalysis. According to psychoanalytic theory, urges and principles guide a person's behaviour. Freud created a full theory of the self. All behaviour has a biological cause. Terms such as the *sub-conscious*, *defense mechanisms*, *therapeutic relationship*, *transference* and *counter-transference* created concepts that had not previously existed. The Cartesian spirit and logic prevailed in society, dictating that a phenomenon or a behaviour pattern must first be comprehended before it can be changed, that the cause lies in the past and needs to be discovered through objective analysis before a problem can be resolved. These ideas brilliantly served Freud's psychoanalytic approach.

it is continued to page 13

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GESTALT & EDUCATION



The *Experiential Workshop on Human Rights* was a pilot programme organized by Gestalt Foundation in cooperation with the national UNESCO Committee and the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs. This programme focused on raising the awareness of secondary education teachers in regard to Human Rights and conflict resolution issues. The challenge for Gestalt psychotherapists participating in this effort was to create the experiential conditions within which we could initially see how teachers themselves experience teaching and how Human rights, such as the right to freedom of thought and expression, are applied within the classroom. So, on January 20-21, 2007, 30 people, most of them psychologists and teachers from state schools of Northern Greece, found themselves interacting through sharing their long experience in school education. What seemed to have been missing up until

then was substantial dialogue; this was facilitated by the phenomenology of the entire affair, i.e. the fact that they were sitting in the same circle, at equal distances, speaking from equal positions; they were motivated at the cognitive and emotional level and were given a different model of learning, which was based on the principles of equality and mutual respect for each other.

Therefore, this was a form of **experiential learning**, for which we used alternative exercises. One of these was the **"educational tablecloth"**, a form of written discussion where teachers recorded their thoughts on a large sheet of paper, answering questions without speaking to each other. There answers are very interesting:

For example, in response to the question "what are my fears?" the answers concerned whether they would manage to overcome their own prejudices and stereotypes in order to transmit to their students the knowledge of what human rights are, in order to motivate them. This fact is indicative of the trend among teachers

to undertake the whole responsibility for the process and to forget the other part of the relationship, i.e. their pupils, as well as the other dimensions of educational conditions, i.e. the pupils' emotions, their readiness for learning, the atmosphere within the classroom, etc. After all, **conflict** was everyone's greatest fear and common weakness.

The Gestalt approach accepts that conflict within a relationship is not so much due to the fact, for example, that the needs of a teacher are different than those of a learner, but more due to the fact that teachers cannot accept that their needs are different from those of their pupils and vice versa, for the simple reason that their position, role and experience is different.

Therefore, we invited teachers to "walk a mile" in their pupils' shoes. When this happened, the teachers made certain interesting discoveries: for example, they discovered how different the personal experience of each "pupil" sharing the same learning experience was; so was the way in which this was interpreted by the rest

of the "class". What they mostly realized, though, was how important the attitude of teachers vis-à-vis their pupils during conflict conditions was, when the teacher does not hesitate to leave the security of his or her position and engage the pupil in authentic dialogue (I Thou), without judging, interpreting or exercising authority over the pupil simply accepting him or her for exactly what he or she is. "...I am what I am You are what you are..." as Fritz Perls reminds us.

At this point, we, too, realize that the acts of learning and psychotherapy share a common ground, i.e. human relations!

Maria Mavridou
Psychologist
Gestalt Psychotherapist

Key words:
teaching,
learning,
knowledge-
relationship,
action, self-
actualisation,
skills,
group

PSYCHOLOGY & EDUCATION

Dimitris Takopoulos, Director of ELIX Coaching Schools

Throughout history and under current conditions, questions concerning education arise. The most basic questions can be summarized around two common axes:

A) Learning and Teaching
B) External Factors that influence Learning and Teaching

A) It is a widely accepted view that Teaching cannot be considered complete on the sole criterion of the existence and authority of the teacher. All people participating in the educational act are in a mutually dependent relationship, i.e. they work as a group. Therefore, excellent knowledge of the subject by the teacher is necessary, but not sufficient. A teacher's communicability is very useful, but not sufficient. Teaching in the Auditorium does not meet the modern needs of education. The model of a teacher with excellent knowledge of a subject and communicability who teaches in an Auditorium is no longer the best response in Education. We know of excellent University tutors who try to teach in a learner-

centred approach even in amphitheatres with two hundred people, receiving questions from students and responding to them.

During our work at ELIX Frontisteria (Coaching Schools) in Thessaloniki, we have been holding group classes in an organized and systematic manner for many years. We use the typical form of group classes, i.e. pupils around a table, the tutor sitting with them but we constantly try to improve the essential features of teaching a group (questions by pupils, synergies, interactivity, interaction, freedom of expression...). Our main argument is that in order for a person to develop under harsh social conditions, they need to have developed their personality as well as their communication and action skills. Group-cooperative teaching gives pupils this opportunity.

Of course, certain questions remain to be answered, such as how the brain develops and through which processes social, educational, personal this development is linked to **"what and how"** each pupil learns. Theories concern both experts and us. In recent years, we have focused on a particularly interesting proposal which concerns the shift from Object Teaching to Teaching Active Subjects.

Psychology, of course, is the science that turned Teaching and Pedagogy tow-

ards the Subject, i.e. the pupils and their active participation and action. The primary goal is to modify the relationship between tutors and pupils, which has erroneously been limited to the transfer of information knowledge. However, the relationship is more important than knowledge and education, as it forms the basis for learning and, subsequently, education and the leap to self-actualisation. Thanks to Psychology findings, through re-examining traditional teaching methods, the centre of gravity has shifted from knowledge to relationship and from there to the group and the whole.

B) Knowledge, relationships and education have their own value, of course. However, goals, studies, vocations and, finally, justification have value as well. They are stages that young people experience within a rapidly changing environment, an environment where:

- The value of goals is not absolute any more
- Further education does not automatically lead to finding a job, as in the past
- Unemployment is on the rise, but even when there is work, nothing can be taken for granted and there is no employment security

- There is an overwhelming volume of information and communication on the Internet is extremely fast

Under all these interesting (favourable or unfavourable) circumstances, a pupil has to sit the Pan-Hellenic University Entrance exams. The anxiety that pupils experience is not due to the Exams, i.e. to the process per se, but to the fact that a 17 year-old has to handle all these issues that are present and cannot be ignored. Therefore, a simplistic approach to the effect that "the child has to learn the syllabus material" no longer suffices when preparing for the University Entrance Exams.

Therefore, handling all these issues does not only concern conventional school education. This where our friends the Psychologists and Counsellors come in. the cooperation of ELIX Coaching Schools with Gestalt, at this point, has truly helped us, as it shed light to various aspects and needs of the pupils. It has been recognised that things other than excellent knowledge of the discipline object are required. We constantly strive to improve ourselves in view of all current requirements. I wish and hope that all educational stakeholders perceive their work from a more spherical viewpoint and substantially help young people cope with contemporary conditions. does not only concern conven-

tional school education. This where our friends the Psychologists and Counselors come in. the cooperation of ELIX Coaching Schools with Gestalt, at this point, has truly helped us, as it shed light to various aspects and needs of the pupils. It has been recognised that things other than excellent knowledge of the discipline object are required. We constantly strive to improve ourselves in view of all current requirements. I wish and hope that all educational stakeholders perceive their work from a more spherical viewpoint and substantially help young people cope with contemporary conditions.

HUMEN RIGHTS... EVERY DAY

A small gift of love and experience on the anniversary day-meeting of Gestalt Foundation celebrating 10 years since its establishment. Thessaloniki, October 12, 2008

Dr. Olga N. Dassiou School Advisor to Philologists, Prefecture of Kilkis



Dear friends,
First of all, my warm wishes to the Gestalt Foundation:

Congratulations, may your dynamic and worthy members continue their beneficial work and important social intervention.

Happy birthday!

I would also like to express my warm thanks to Gestalt members for the honour and pleasure you give to me by selecting me to participate in this day-meeting as the representative of the Programme entitled "Experiential Workshop, aiming at Raising Awareness on issues of Conflict Resolution at schools, focusing on Human Rights". This was an important programme that took place in Thessaloniki on January 20 and 21, 2007, in cooperation with the Directorate of International Relations of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs, the Greek National Committee of UNESCO and Gestalt Foundation, with an Evaluation Day-Meeting held on June 3, 2007.

I will start from the end. In late September of this year, I closed a cycle of an outreaching programme of Training for Newly Appointed Philologists in the Prefecture of Kilkis. We spent 20 significant, "fertile" hours together, 21 new colleagues and I as a trainer and school advisor for their discipline in the Prefecture: 22 personalities, 22 individuals, each with their own thoughts, priorities and daily schedules which were left behind attended, "performing their duty". The time eventually came to exchange our farewells. A young colleague stood up and started passing around a sheet of paper, encouraging everyone to write down their address so as to "keep in touch". "Aren't I here?" I joked, and participated in the circulation, reproduction and distribution of the now-filled page. The meeting ended...But having this experience from the Experi-

ential Workshop organized by Gestalt...I could not close this cycle of fermentation, conflict, convergence, fertile cooperation, debate and acquaintance with a simple "goodbye". Within four days, we had become a strong team with cohesion, open channels of communication, the will to make common efforts through "open doors". "This photocopied 'address book' is the link that connects us. Look at it semantically: We all gave something and took away something during these days of common co-existence and not just our addresses", I told my new colleagues. And we parted in this emotionally charged atmosphere with more than just a simple "goodbye".

This was part of what I kept as my experience from my contact and acquaintance with Gestalt, from the three unforgettable days I shared with its people, with the excellent, zealous sensitivity of Vera Dilari from the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs, with my colleagues.

First of all was the circle...People sitting next to each other in direct contact, equally, opposite each other and not opposed to each other or in hierarchical order, removed from our offices-roles. It was the warmth, the friendly disposition, the beautiful feeling that you are being understood and accepted, calling each other by our first names, something that seemed odd to us, who were "addicted" to using the plural and invoking our hierarchical position. "Mister", "Miss", "Mr. Principal", "Ms. Principal" had become Kostas, Yiannis, Valia, Olga, Katia, Maria, Ioanna...

Then came the "pairs". Internal conflict...How could I "dislike" the colleague who picked me as "unlikeable" when he was so likable to me? "Why me?" I asked in surprise. But how could I express what was hardest of all: that the "likeable" colleague in the pairs of "those who liked each other" seemed shallow in her choice, her

only criterion being that "we are both active"? What about arrogance? What about pride? Aren't those an obstacle? Why don't I pick? Why allow to be picked? Serenity and Anger in unison...

Then came the astonishing experience of the "tablecloth". We go around in a circle and record what we feel and think about certain issues axes set by our Gestalt colleagues. We are shocked when we read everyone's opinions recorded on the now posted "tablecloth", realizing the similarity of experiences, feelings, anxieties, disappointments and uplift... "It's as if I wrote it..."

In a subsequent discussion group on addressing a conflict situation in the classroom, I realize the variety of approaches and discover people with internal aspects that had been vague until then...And I heard Antonia say "I'm the psychologist in here" and realize the conflict with and due to crossing your limits...Such a useful experience in practicing my duties in human resources management...

And...what is a teacher to do during a class of Modern Greek History with students-roles [played by our colleagues] the naughty student, the imaginary patient, the demanding top student, the annoying one, the inattentive one, the enamoured one that keeps staring out the window...Is she to function as a bridge between the war hero Georgios Karaiskakis and the "Olympiacos football stadium" named after him, between the Greek Revolution of 1821 and a "love affair between an actor and a model", the eliciting "wedged" question "so, did the revolutionaries of 1821 play football" and "which were the best known love affairs of the Liberation Struggle?" It seems to be working; something is happening and Maria records it, communicating a hopeful message in her text which I now systematically reproduce in order to support my colleagues i.e. that a social psychologist considers

valuable certain aspects of teaching that we tutors underestimate and do not exploit...

In a circle - Katia asks me why I express feelings by referencing movies, musical pieces or paintings. Why? I hoard the question...They, the "Gestalt Girls", describe how they feel with such accuracy, warmth, directness and emotion...and I love that so much. I read her text on role conflict to colleagues under my responsibility...

A line on a blank sheet of paper. It goes around. It returns, after each one of us has drawn an expressive, almost metaphysical statement about our Being. Each individual, the many...the person, the group...conflict, communication...profit, contemplation. In my office, I always keep the shell and piece of string that we cut and took with us upon leaving the programme evaluation day-meeting in June 2007.

A Student Performance staged by the 4th Junior High School of Sykies at the 2006-2007 School Year End Ceremony on Thursday, May 17, 2007, "HUMAN RIGHTS...EVERY DAY 19 Stories of Everyday Madness and...Human Rights in 19 Scenes" by Olga N. Dassiou, then principal of the school, organised within the context of its inclusion in ASP Network UNESCO and the programme co-organised with Gestalt, which was the first "visible outcome", as was the enriching of my advisory work with Foundation material and texts.

I come back to the colleagues whom I bid farewell last September...Upon leaving, they all shook my hand and thanked me. I was happy, but I could not quite understand why they were thanking me. However, I would like to express this "thank you" to Gestalt with all my heart and wishing them the best.

Thank you for your valuable work, I wish you the very best and hope that you will always receive the same gratitude as mine from everyone who works with you!

Despoina Balliou

VIEWS & ATTITUDES IN THE LEARNING PROCESS



It is true that each psychotherapeutic approach and, thus, each school differs not only in terms of theoretical and methodological content, but also in terms of process, i.e. the way in which it transfers and communicates said content.

Consequently, the theoretical methodological content (i.e. theory and philosophy) cannot be detached from the educational process.

Therefore, in this presentation, I will try to shed light on some of the major aspects of the process followed during psychotherapy training, according to the Gestalt theory.

First of all, Gestalt therapy is an experiential approach; this means that it focuses on direct contact with "what" and "how" a person thinks, feels and acts in the present.

Consequently, during training, we talk about experiential learning, whereby knowledge is generated through the conversion of experience. D. Kolb, based on Kurt Lewin, gives us four stages in the form of the circle of experiential learning. These four stages can be interpreted as an "educational cycle", whereby the cycle moves from direct experience, which provides the basis for observation and reflection. These observations and reflections are assimilated and lead to the structuring of certain abstract concepts, producing implications for action; the person can experiment with these implications, which, in turn, will create new experiences.

So, during the process of experiential learning, trainees bring their personal experiences to the group process and by recognizing their feelings, sensations and thoughts, bestow meaning upon their experience and acquire knowledge regarding the therapeutic process. However, it would be dangerous, if not arrogant, to believe that a

person using nothing but his or her experience, sensations and emotions could safely produce psychotherapy (in that case, every patient could become a psychotherapist, which is impossible).

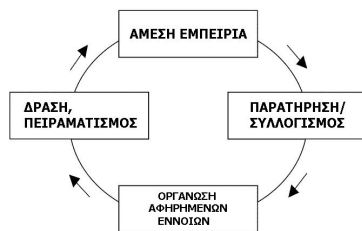
The process of learning how to conduct psychotherapy requires the study of theory.

Kurt Lewin, a Gestalt theoretician, supports that there is nothing better and more practical than a good theory. Without a good theory, we remain without direction and guidance. Yontef supports that a good theory is clear, continuous and makes a difference.

A good theory encompasses a process; it is not something permanent or fixed, it is not an object, it is not a dogma. It includes the recognition of its weaknesses and complementing aspects. It is a process that steadily tests, changes and improves.

Therefore, it is important that, during the educational process, experience should be linked to the specific Gestalt theory, for its processing and assimilation to be enhanced and for its creative development to be allowed.

Since Gestalt therapy is a holistic process and supports the field theory, its teaching should be holistic, as well. What does this mean? It means that the knowledge of important scientific fields of the general psychotherapeutic community (e.g. DSM) is equally



substantial and taken into account and used during the educational process, if the trainee is to work in private practice based on knowledge.

Therefore, we adhere to our principles, i.e. the uniqueness of a person and his or her feelings and thoughts (in this case, the trainee), while also abiding with a sound professional and academic back-

ground. In other words, we support the individuality, motivation and creativity of the trainee, while also allowing space and placing value on formal education, which includes specific goals, processes and duties.

Gestalt psychotherapy cannot comply with its teaching if it does not follow the principles of existential methodology and dialogue. These principles tend to perceive the educational process as a relationship between the trainer and the trainee, a relationship based on presence, inclusion and mutual dialogue between the person teaching and the person learning. As the Polsters say, when everything goes well at the meeting, it is hard to distinguish the trainer from the trainee.

(I won't focus on this relationship any longer, as there is a presentation on this subject by trainees, who can further illuminate this topic).

The cornerstone of Gestalt therapy is the principle stating that contact is the first reality and that all human activities are linked to the interaction between an organism and its environment. Therefore, what type of environment facilitates learning and development? First of all, this ideal environment requires sensitivity on the part of the trainer in regard to the phenomenological field of the trainee.

The attitude and role undertaken by the trainer is central and substantial, e.g. enthusiasm, defensiveness, respect for disagreement, directness, sarcasm, sensitivity vis-à-vis feelings of shame and so forth are very powerful emotions and play a crucial role in learning. They lay the foundations and shape the confidence that trainees have in themselves, they promote self-knowledge and self-esteem, they encourage trainees' appetite, enhance their enthusiasm, excite their curiosity, stimulate their motivation and autonomy, contribute to the feeling of security and to the study and exploration of new ideas. It is also vitally important for the trainer to respect the personal style of the trainee and to help him or

her harmonise methodology with his or her skills and values.

According to Otto Rank, teaching psychotherapy means giving the prospective therapist the possibility of becoming, in his words, a master: "An artist that uses his or her personal skills and assets as the basic resources for cognizance and therapeutic contact".

Therefore, we urge trainees to recognize, comprehend and utilize their knowledge and what they already know and might not have clarified yet. However, this is not enough; we also encourage them to learn what we know, what we consider necessary for them, even if the trainees are not aware of that.

According to M. Miller, we advocate the creation of an environment that facilitates learning and development, but we do not adopt the view that trainees decide what they want to learn and create their own curriculum, choosing their own methods. It's as if we're telling them, in Miller's words, "let them eat a piece of cake".

As Rousseau states, the goal of education is, in fact, self-definition; nevertheless, students need to be taught how to define themselves.

The process of learning how to practise psychotherapy includes personal development, theoretical training based on a specific curriculum shaped by teachers, practical experience, supervision and lifelong learning.

Its goal is not to transfer a mechanistic model that leads trainees to "I practise psychotherapy", but to create a relational context that leads to "I am a psychotherapist".

Trainers and trainees meet and experience the circle of contact (pre-contact contact final contact post-contact); starting with enthusiasm and anxiety, travelling to "what now" and reaching "who are we".

Speaking personally about my experience so far, as a trainer, the process of teaching Gestalt includes the challenge of meeting something new and different, the continuous evolution of contact and the creative assimilation of content.



THE COMMUNAL APPROACH to TRAINING GROUP PSYCHOANALYSTS

Skandaliari Themelina

For the Group Therapy Approach, Training is primarily a developmental experience and not just an educational one. For this reason, educational methodology aims “at a holistic experience of learning and maturation” (Hearst, 1995, Behr 1995), aiming at cultivating the personality and constructing the identity of the Group Psychoanalyst.

A decisive role in the educational process is played by the way in which knowledge and learning are acquired and transmitted, i.e. teaching.

I. K. Tsengos, referring to the learning process, underlines that “knowledge, as opposed to information, is a complex process that requires, to a certain extent, ‘unlearning’; learning is related to its object, but mostly concerns the subject that seeks it. Learning is mainly acquired through experience, which is greatly affected by interaction with others, preferably more than one person, as well as by the context, which has to be suitable for the task at hand (o.p. 1995³, p. 118).

The Educational Community of Group Psychoanalysts of Athens Institute of Group Analysis

The Training of Group Psychoanalysts at the Athens Institute of Group Analysis, which was founded in 1982, combines the established method of training in Group Analysis, as developed by Foulkes and his colleagues at London Institute, on the basis of the fundamental principles of the Therapeutic Community. Therefore, this training is characterized by its operating as an Educational Community.

A basic belief is that every person learns

better when participating in a group, when actively involved in numerous and varied activities, when living, feeling and responding to the various levels of relating he or she incessantly participates in.

Correspondingly, a training programme has to include a range of activities, so as to give students the opportunity to try, to learn and to promote not only their professional skills, but certain personal qualities as well (creativity, responsibility, interest, imagination, critical thinking). The most suitable form proved to be the Communal one, provided it includes numerous and varied group activities organized in such a way that group members are urged to function at multiple levels, participating actively and creatively rather than attending as passive, impartial listeners. Through the communal training form, the views of S.H. Foulkes concerning the principle of Group Analysis, which means *The Ego Training in Action*, are expressed in the educational sector.

The Educational Community is defined as “the field of education that motivates with clarity, responsibility and flexibility the healthy, actual part of trainers’ and trainees’ Ego, aiming at personal development and smooth operation of the field, with the goal of acquiring maximum knowledge and experience in relating and coordinating” (G. K. Tsengos, 2002).

BASIC TRAINING ACTIVITIES

- *Personal Therapy in a Mixed Analytical Group*
- *Supervised Clinical Exercise (group of students with an experienced observer)*
- *Theoretical Seminars*
- *Participation in Seminars and*

Conferences

- *Papers*
- *Creation of an Analytical Group by the Student*
- *Participation in the Personnel Groups of the Therapeutic Departments of the ---*
- *Open Psychotherapeutic Centre*

COMMUNAL ACTIVITIES

- *Sensitivity Group*
- *Self-esteem Group*
- *Inter-Educational/Inter-disciplinary Meetings*
- *Symposia*
- *Organisational Meetings*
- *Organisational Activities (depending on the year of training)*

The overall training programme does not only take place with the participation of students in a number of groups, but with a strong sense that every student is a member of the Community, which means that they undertake various responsibilities in order for Community goals to be achieved (Tsengos, 2002).

This provides a pretty clear pedagogical environment, which does not aim at providing information or theories *ex cathedra*, but at providing living, “non-denominational” knowledge, cultivating acceptance and particularly the delicate art of unlearning learning. These approaches and experiments resulted in some interesting inventions, such as a new method of supervision (Tsengos, 1995a).

In conclusion, the Communal method of training and acquisition of clinical experience:

- a. Accelerates students’ maturation process by stabilizing their personal changes in relation to the Self, to

interpersonal relationships and to reality

b. Serves important parameters, such as:

- Selection
- Suitability
- Cognizance of the Self Knowledge
- Creativity
- Skills

This is achieved through:

The contact each trainee has with his or her own personal experiences and conflict situations, which, obviously, he or she is called upon to recognize and, if possible, resolve (Therapy Clinical Exercise);

The continuous changing of roles (minor peer adult) and levels of function (real symbolic imaginary) and the alteration between structured and non-structured situations. This continuous variation contributes towards creating a learning structure;

Through the experience of relating provided by communal training and by the organisation as a whole, through personnel meetings and major sensitivity meetings.

The Communal approach to training Group Psychoanalysts does not only aim at the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which usually results in trainees being “chained” to the role of an ignorant, powerless child and in trainers being “chained” to the role of an adult, keeper of the absolute truth, exercising power.

On the contrary, apart from knowledge and skills, the cultivation of trust and continuous and multiple relating aims at the maturation of trainers and trainees, a major factor in finally shaping one’s professional identity.

Systemic Centre for Training & Psychological Support SKEPSY

TRAINING 4 years + 1 preliminary-supervisory year

The Systemic Centre for Training and Psychological Support was founded in December 1998 by Manolis Tsangarakis and Giorgos Economou.

The Framework, the Process and the Experience form the three directional axes systemic concepts that per-

meate all of the Training. The Framework works as a stable but changing field, since it is defined by the relationships between the members of SKEPSY, i.e. the trainers and the trainees. The relationships and the experience bestow meaning upon the educational experience, contributing to the organisation and evolution of the educational institute and its members.

The Training plan is practically depicted in the **Handbook of Operation**, which presents the philosophy

and the goals, the Specialisation Training Programme, the Training Material Topics and the Organisational Chart of the Centre’s Operation.

In the **Applications** of the Specialisation Programme, experience serves as common ground for all forms in which Training takes place at SKEPSY: the teaching of theory is connected to the Experiential Practical Exercises, the Practical Training and Supervision are connected to the promotion and utilisation of aspects concerning self-reference and resonance. The same takes place at Technical Training Workshops. Specifically, Practical Training takes place within the framework of the Centre and concerns a) the use of a

EXISTENTIALISM & THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

Alexis Charissiadis, M.Sc. Counselling Psychology, MBA.
Founding member of "gignesthai", the Greek Existential Psychology Group.



What we must underline, first of all, is that there is not a single existential approach to psychotherapy. In existential psychology, there is not one single person, whether a Freud or a Carl Rogers, that has marked the entire approach with his or her personality and theoretical work. On the contrary, there are numerous and important personalities who have contributed and defined what has come to be known as existential psychology, creating a plethora of views that enrich but also complicate the understanding of the essence of this approach.

Philosophical Origin

Existential psychology has a philosophical origin. It wasn't created by psychologists, or, at least, psychologists according to the modern definition of the term. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that began in the 19th century and reached its peak at the end of World War II and in the 1950s. It was named *ex post facto* and its most renowned representative to the general public was Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). However, the most important philosophers of the 19th century who have been characterised as existential were Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). The most important existential philosopher of the 20th century was undoubtedly Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).

Psychology as Philosophical Anthropology

The modern definition of psychology

states that psychology is the science of the mind and behaviour, while a psychologist is a person involved in understanding human behaviour. While this definition wonderfully serves the scientific aspects of modern psychology, this does not suffice for existentialism, in the sense of focusing on and studying the deeper essence of human existence, i.e. what it means to be and exist as a human being. So, in regard to psychology, existentialism looks to the past, to the 19th century, when psychology was not yet separate from philosophy, but emerged from and co-existed with it. In this context, and in order to continue this presentation, when we speak about psychology or psychologists, we will be referring to a scientific discipline that could be characterized as "Philosophical Anthropology".

The Tragedy and Grandeur of Existence

A first chapter that Existentialism focuses on is the Tragedy and, I would add, the Grandeur of existence. Existentialism is, in a sense, a "troublesome" approach. It reminds us of what we would like to forget. However, even though many existential facts are indeed unpleasant and hard to address head-on, existentialism believes that there is meaning and value in at least being able to approach them. Obviously, the "toughest issue" is death. It truly is the fundamental aspect that colours all other parameters of our lives, colouring our life itself, and, naturally, contact with this issue is the source of existential dread and anxiety, even terror and despair, at times.

Any contact with existential aspects is a source of anxiety. However, this is not anxiety that requires therapy. It is not neurotic anxiety (although it can easily turn into it). It is existential anxiety. It is interwoven with our nature and, although unpleasant, it may serve a very specific and substantial purpose: it brings us into contact with our very existence, our true selves. Kierkegaard states that anxiety individualises, i.e. makes us individuals. This is directly connected to another important aspect of Existential Psychology, which is Authenticity.

Authenticity

Authenticity is an important and often misunderstood concept. In its simplest form, it means that you should be true and faithful to yourself. You should be yourself. This concept, which, in its existential form, originates from Heidegger, implies that people can live authentically or inauthentically. This doesn't mean that there are authentic or inauthentic people. We all have our authentic and inauthentic moments. For Heidegger, people are in an inauthentic situation when they lose themselves in everyday life and the lives, views and opinions of others and become authentic when they realize their own existence, which, while, of course, connected to and dependent upon other people, is also proof of each one's uniqueness. This realization, according to Heidegger, mainly comes from the realization of our mortality and from contact with existential anxiety. In a way, the price for authenticity is existential anxiety. Or, to view it in a positive light, existential anxiety can lead to a more authentic life.

Training in Existential Psychotherapy

In conclusion, I would like to stress three points which I believe to be of exceptional importance for the subject at hand. The first one is that trainee therapists and, in my view, therapists in general, must keep in mind that they cannot and do not have to "heal" the human condition. When I refer to the human condition, I refer to its existential aspects. This fight is, ultimately, not only futile but also non-therapeutic, even though our desire to move in this direction is perfectly understandable and, ultimately, quite human.

The second point I would like to stress, which is connected to the first point, is that since therapists have to be familiar with what we call the "human condition", psychotherapists cannot base their training exclusively on the discipline of psychology, but need a far wider education that includes knowledge of philosophy, sociology, familiarity with history and, I would add, substantial contact with the arts, since they crystallise the entire range of human experience. Art is the imprint of experience.

Finally, the third point I would like to stress, which is the most important of all and concerns the training of therapists, is that what distinguishes a good therapist from the rest is not so much what he or she *does* as who he or she *is*. This shows how lengthy, multi-faceted and substantial the training of a person who wants to *be called* and, mainly, *to be* a psychotherapist has to be.

one-way mirror and b) the observation of group therapy from the viewpoint of the third chair. In both cases, the experiential part takes place through direct supervision, which follows therapeutic sessions.

The Plenary is a special activity within the training system, convening 2 to 3 times a year. It is characterized by the fact that trainers and trainees participate in it as equals. The Plenary is coordinated by trainees and focuses on the process of relationships, the experience and the bestowal of meaning upon the experience.

The Preliminary year is mainly a supervisory year that introduces trainees to systemic theory and thought.

The main objective of the training **methodology**

concerns:

- Expression of trainees' competences
- Familiarization with the systemic method of thought
- Creation of a personal approach to knowledge and therapy

- Observation of the self as part of the system which trainees themselves observe

By observing the self within the therapeutic system, trainee psychotherapists learn how to combine the **therapeutic thought and attitude** they apply within their professional environment with the **training theory and practice** they experience within the context of their training. In a secure training environment, trainees trust

and recognize what their own patients will trust during therapy sessions with them. During their four years of training, trainees are given the opportunity to experience within the training relationship what they will experience as professional therapists in the context of a fifty-minute session.

Applying the methodology is a prerequisite condition to achieving the **main objectives** of Training, which orientate trainees towards composing the personal and professional traits of their identity, growing and maturing. A trainee's personal therapy, which is considered necessary, contributes towards both methodology implementation and goal achievement.

A little over ten years ago, we set out on our journey. Our luggage then consisted of our experience and training; we began organizing an educational course in the Gestalt psychotherapeutic approach. Our vision was to create a comprehensive, recognized, educational course of studies. During a period when there were very few organized educational courses in psychotherapy, we set out on a journey of creativity and development that exceeded all our expectations.

A little over ten years later, our educational course in Gestalt psychotherapy has been recognized by EAGT (European Association for Gestalt Therapy) and EAP (European Association for Psychotherapy) and the Gestalt Foundation is held in high esteem by colleagues and associations in Greece and abroad, as proven by the successful organisation of the 9th European Conference of Gestalt Therapy titled “*Exploring Human Conflict*” (September 2007, Athens).

Apart from the educational course, we also organize a number of seminars, groups and events every year, the greatest one being the annual Four-Day Workshop with training and experiential groups. We maintain our cooperation with 16 agencies throughout Greece, providing our trainees and alumni with volunteer work and opportunities for further specialization. We participate in intervention programmes within the broader social field in any manner and whenever we can. We develop our continuous education and training programmes with supervisory groups and specialized clinical and training seminars. The Centre's website also continues to evolve and our newspaper celebrated its 10th issue and 5th year of operation. As “nothing good comes free”, in the words of Bucay, all this requires

hard work and dedication. This is why I feel personally grateful to my associates and fellow founders of Gestalt Foundation, namely, Yianna, Despoina and Katia, who continue to share the work and responsibility of our original creation with me.



I also feel grateful to all the people who support us, work with us and love us, with all our capabilities and limitations. This journey has taken us through so many places and fluctuations along the way, as well as fellow travelers. Throughout the years, the Gestalt Foundation has operated and continues to operate as a forum for communication and exchange, as a creative starting point for discussion, debate and numerous innovative actions and partnerships. Some people came and have remained our fellow travellers from the very start to date; others stayed for a while and then left; others were critical, while there were others who chose to keep a discreet distance.

I believe that each and every contact and partnership has helped me and helped us develop and draft our profile, which we continue to “sculpt” through our experiences. Every “yes” and “no” has helped us set our limits, shape our principles and philosophy with greater clarity and decide on the actions we believe will help us apply our values. Therefore, I would like to thank everyone who has shared part of the creation and development of Gestalt Foundation, as you have helped me and helped us change, progress and grow. On we go!

Antonia Konstantinidou

(Speech excerpt)

Harm Siemens

THE VALUE OF THE CONTINUOUS COMMITMENT PROCESS

Today, we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Greek Gestalt Foundation; we are especially honouring the people who created this school of Gestalt training and therapy.

The school started out in a state of confusion, under uncertain conditions, but Katia, Despoina, Yianna, and Antonia said “yes” to each other.

They were all convinced that they could manage the process of establishing such a school.

At an early stage they were able to build a network: they did not work in isolation.

This network has supported them and helped them achieve their dynamic goals. They were also able to find good supportive colleagues in the administration department who also underpinned the quality of the school.

Getting back to the 4 founding members, they all had a different style of therapy and teaching, that is to say: they all had a different form of genuine, personal expression and communication, but they were all aware of the professional goals of the institute.

The school invited interesting trainers from outside Greece. The knowledge and vision these trainers brought into the school were

assimilated into the students' curriculum.

What I was saying earlier was that the founding members were all committed to the responsibility they took on when they set up the organization.

Commitment is not a technique. It is the process of keeping to the original “yes”.

Commitment makes a person trustworthy, even if one hesitates and does not know how to move on. Commitment makes people strong if they are not afraid of feedback.

We need intellectual dialogue (exchange of views).

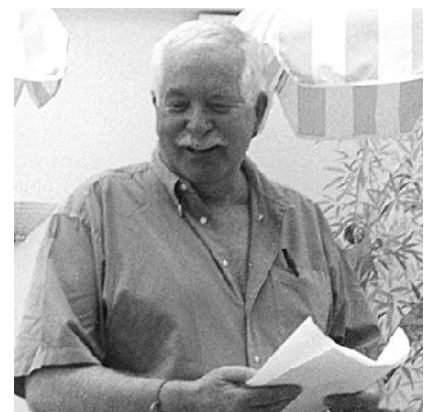
Truth emerges from struggling with ideas, and includes adequate feedback.

Feedback should always support a person, enable them to move on.

The members of “Gestalt Foundation” set out with a strong commitment, and continued their work for the school of Gestalt training and therapy on the basis of the same strong commitment. What's more, they are still keeping up with their work.

The action of being committed to a purpose matches a person's competences and skills emerging from their family of origin and developed through professional training.

In my own family of origin, for instance, there was always the strength to handle any problem that arose, the strength to keep on



going under any circumstances, especially during the difficulties of life in World War II.

I think, and I almost know for certain, that, above, all I owe my inspiration to commit myself to my work, my Gestalt work with people to this strength my father and my mother showed when faced with problems.

A second source of my inspiration was my Gestalt teachers, many of whom were the pioneers in applying Gestalt therapy.

But commitment is embedded in an even stronger field. A field in Gestalt terms is, as you know, a totality of mutually influencing forces that together form a unified interactive whole. It is not only in our western Christian culture that we encounter the essential concept of compassion, a strong commitment to support fellow humans in need, indeed, an important aspect of civilization.

From times immemorial the concept of compassion has also been developed in eastern cultures. Take Buddhism, for instance. This school of thought adapted the



GESTALT FOUNDATION...

of tension, enthusiasm, commitment to our vision, establishment and development of a Centre of Psychotherapy & Education, aiming at the recognition, dissemination and teaching of the psychotherapeutic approach we have experienced, believed in and loved. 10 years of moving forward, evolving and succeeding.

This has been a collective journey with Yianna, Andonia and Katia, building, tearing down, "chewing over", assimilating. We have shared this vision committed to responsibility, united in crisis. Tireless in creating, we have managed to realize this life dream. Our companions on this journey have been our close colleagues, trainees, agencies and others, who have supported us, taught us, loved us and trusted us. I thank them all.

Still, what does the creation of an educational programme in psychotherapy mean? It is a complex process that includes "what" and "how". The goal was and remains the teaching of the theory and methodology of the Gestalt psychotherapeutic approach and the involvement of trainees in experiencing and substantially using concepts and skills in their professional practice, thus forming their own unique and responsible professional style.

We have organized our educational course on this basis and I believe we have succeeded and continue with the deep commitment, responsibility, seriousness and ethos required for psychotherapy and its teaching.

Despina Balliou

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the operation of Gestalt Foundation.

I look back in awe, realizing the immense volume of work we have completed in this decade.

We implemented an educational programme, the organisation and planning of which was based on modern international standards of psychotherapy, which was certified by the European Association for Psychotherapy.

Through cooperation with Greek and foreign educators and supervisors and through receiving information at conferences and from international related literature, we have sustained a regime of dynamic and continuous evaluation, assessment, creative adaptation and evolution in regard to the content and the process of our educational programme and our own personal evolution.

We have been and remain alert to and in contact with issues and changes put forward by modern society needs and the way in which these affect methods and applications in the field of education and psychotherapy.

Returning to the present, I feel gratitude and love for all the people who have accompanied us during this difficult but creative process, because all this could not have happened without their full support; I want to thank each of them, whether an old or new supporter, from the bottom of my heart.

I would also like to thank my associates for the strong ties of trust and devotion we developed over the years, as well as the commitment to the ideas and purposes that we set at the conscious and unconscious level.

However, the guarantee and the broadening of our horizon towards the future lie in our trainees and graduates, who have honoured us with their choice.

"I thank you all"

Yianna Yiamarelou

principle of far-reaching commitment to compassion. According to Buddhists, commitment is the key to evolution and consciousness. The Buddhist movement is the embodiment of compassion, stamina and commitment.

I am not a Buddhist and I don't know much about it, but when I was working in India,

They know: I am in all others, and all others are in me.

Many of the pioneers of Gestalt philosophy and practice, including Fritz Perls, were inspired by the principles of Buddhism. Now, let me make a connection to the 'here and now' of this one day event celebrating the 10th anniversary of Gestalt Foundation. Let me, also, share a vision of the future of our Gestalt work, let us say a vision for the next 10 years.

The central theme of my speech for today is: **the value of commitment as a continuous process.**

For me, the important contribution of volunteer's services to society is striking. Volunteers (members of organizations, Gestalt Foundation staff, trainees and graduates) are by definition committed to their tasks. Volunteers participate in a continuous commitment process,

a commitment that is supported by vision, compassion, stamina and training. Gestalt training is, of course, training in awareness.

I think that a volunteer who has learned and assimilated the principle of Gestalt, would like to teach, to show or to pass on these principles to others in one way or the other, even if only by putting the Gestalt principles into practice whatever voluntary work they have undertaken.

By showing their commitment, volunteers



disseminate the continuous process of commitment, which will be picked up and continued by others.

The first event following my speech concerns the establishment of a "Blood Bank" and you will hear more about it in a minute.

The first panel of today's programme is about the **"Social Responsibility of Psychotherapists"**. I am happy that Gestalt Foundation has initiated relations with various psychotherapeutic approaches.

I think that it is indeed our social responsibility to see to it that Gestalt psychotherapy and other psychotherapeutic schools will get to know and respect each other, and that they will be open to learn from each other's achievements, without losing their own identity.

I hope that in the future this will also include professionals of competent disciplines that until now have had nothing or little to do with Gestalt therapy.

Publications on Gestalt theory, method and practice in professional journals, coming to the assistance of practicing professionals of various approaches and disciplines will help in attracting more attention to our Gestalt therapy work and its results and effecti-



working with people, and listening about Buddhism, I was moved by the simplicity of the people and the way they accepted themselves and others.

The basic principle is fundamentally a condition of the heart or a state of consciousness, and finds concrete embodiment in actual human lives.

Humans undertake the commitment to cultivate that condition of state of consciousness as much for themselves as for others. It is not just enlightenment for them-

10th

XPONIA

ago...September 2008 and something more...It seems like a dream...

A life journey based on the vision of organized education in Gestalt psychotherapy, which appealed to us so much during our years of study -with faith in people and human potential as our guide and compass and with contributing to society as our main concern... Antonia, Yianna, Despoina, associates and fellow travellers on this creative journey, I think "we've done alright" ... at least so far. I hope that, in the future, we'll manage to prove worthy of the confidence and love extended to us all these years by you, our clients, trainees, colleagues and agencies who have supported us and continue to support us, who have believed in us and connected your lives to ours.

I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart an endless list of people who have "shone" on our path and "warmed" our hearts, who have dynamically "shared" important parts of this evolution a personal,

unique, deep and honest "thank you" to Olympia and Stelios, my parents, who believed in me, supported and encouraged me, fostered and encouraged me and, most of all, infused the whole endeavour with warm-heartedness and continuous presence. I am grateful! Also, a warm 'thank you' to my sister Christina for her particularly discreet and ceaseless support to every "here and now" of this journey.

Finally, I would especially like to thank and deeply recognize the contribution of Maria Farmaki, both for her substantial support at numerous levels at the beginning of this effort and for the unique way in which she has accompanied us during this decade.

Giorgos Diplas, Harm, Dick, Nurith, Ken, Peter...you have all left your "mark" on our map...through inspiration, teaching, sharing...

Lina, Anneta, Zoe, Irene, Eva, Emmanuella, Marialena, Nikolas, Elsa...without you...Well, a "thank you" is hardly enough...

The vision still exists, and as for creating...let's hope it will keep evolving...

Katia Chatzilakou



veness in various problem cases.

I am thinking of publications regarding the applications of Gestalt therapy or Gestalt principles and their effect among different groups of people under different kinds of circumstances.

I might say that it is part of our commitment to transfer our knowledge, experience, and skills to others by means of reports on issues like: how do we, as Gestalt therapists, work with young people who are inclined towards becoming borderline cases? How do we work with people who suffer from depression, people with traumas, people with anxiety complexes, with compulsion disorders, with psychosomatic problems?

And how do we, as Gestalt therapists, work with the different attitudes vis-à-vis vulnerable groups in our society? Nowadays, as ordinary citizens, we cannot claim anymore that we have nothing to do with the growing group of vulnerable fellow-humans we encounter every day in the streets or read about in the newspapers. We cannot say: that's none of my business. Therefore, it is important to organize Gestalt training and workshops on the subject of how to work with such groups.

In relation to my personal Gestalt vision for the development of Gestalt work as I see it for the next 10 years, I would like to express my

respect for the remarkable vitality of the Greek Gestalt Foundation.

At this celebration of the 10th anniversary, the staff and fellow workers of the institute have already achieved many of their goals, and there seems to be no end to their commitment process and the expansion of their activities. Therefore, today's title and program are an excellent choice. I have no doubt that many of my wishes for the future are within reach as far as the Greek Gestalt Foundation is concerned.

I would like to include one of my strongest personal wishes before I finish: it is to set up and consolidate an international, even intercontinental Gestalt network of individuals, groups and institutions. "Contact is the appreciation of differences", is what Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, said. No-boundary contact means deepening, widening and mutual inspiration in regard to Gestalt theory and practice.

I myself travel not only in Greece, to Thessaloniki, to meet you on special occasions like today and to share views and experiences with you; my commitment extends to many European countries as well as countries outside the Europe where I take part in different Gestalt training projects. This expands my awareness, my consciousness,

my inspiration and my commitment.

Finally, there is still one more personal wish I would like to share with you in view of the key words of today: the value of the continuous commitment process.

I wish that the Gestalt pioneers and trainers of today, in the fullness of time, will assign with confidence their work to a new generation of Gestalt psychotherapists who will further build up and expand the good work. As we can see in today's programme, there is plenty of work to do.

One of my Flemish colleagues once said: "As a teacher you can see that the stars of your successors are beginning to shine more brightly in the sky, and that your own star is fading. Gestalt trainers and teachers should be thankful for this process of evolution."

I hope the torch will be handed down many times to new generations of colleagues who are aware of the value of their input in a continuous commitment process.

I wish you a pleasant and inspiring day of celebration and sharing!

Thank you!

Harm Siemens
October 2008, Thessaloniki Greece

ETHICS Why?

Pavlos
Zaroyiannis

Ethics and Training in Psychotherapy



Professional Ethics

Ethics should not only be implied, but also form a significant part of training in psychotherapy. Why is this? Why is Ethics necessary? Is Ethics necessary in Psychotherapy training? Ethics is **absolutely necessary, but not sufficient**. It is not enough per se. I will return to this point later.

Ethics is absolutely necessary in Psychotherapy Training. This is because of the **nature of the profession** future therapists train in. A Psychotherapist's profession is, among other things, impossible, difficult, demanding, special, unique, lonely, controversial, hazardous, marginal. It often oscillates between what is socially acceptable, i.e. social norms/normality and personal differences, i.e. deviation/particularities. As such, the psychotherapeutic profession needs to be **protected** from external factors and internal hazards. It is this very **hazardous particularity** of the profession that makes the existence of Ethics necessary. By **external factors**, I mean all social (family), political and legal parameters that affect or may affect the psychotherapeutic act and by **internal factors**, I mean the potential arbitrariness and arrogance of psychotherapists, a sense of omnipotence that might emerge and warp their work.

Therefore, Ethics may **operate at 2 levels**:

- On the one hand, Ethics helps us create a "**social face**" - since we are

not alone or operating in a vacuum - so that we may be in a position to answer for our work or support it, if necessary (who we are, how and under what conditions we work and so on);

- On the other hand, Ethics helps us create a "**framework**" within which we can provide our services to our clients, **protecting** ourselves, the other person, our relationship and the work that is to take place from arbitrariness, errors, poor management, abuse of power, manipulation, exploitation, etc. Therefore:

a) Ethics **does not simply accompany** the psychotherapeutic act, but precedes it, because **it makes this act possible**. If there are no basic ethical rules, then no minimum space is secured in order for psychotherapy to be practiced;

b) Ethics has a preventive character in regard to avoiding errors and conflict. In this light, Ethics must form a fundamental constituent of training in psychotherapy. Future therapists need to get to know and learn the Code of Ethics of the profession they are being trained for, to study it, to become familiar with it, aiming at assimilating this Code, so that:

- They may learn how to examine issues that will emerge during their work in the light of ethics

- They may **become aware**, wonder about and discuss fundamental ethical issues, such as maintaining one's autonomy, preventing damage, providing care, equal treatment

- They may potential answer some of these issues

- They may **prepare**, as well as possible, to apply ethics during the therapeutic act

- They may develop their readiness to constantly monitor their own behaviour

- Finally, they may acquire "**ethical proficiency**" and professional **responsibility**

Morality

However, as I stated above, Ethics is necessary, but not sufficient. I would say that Ethics alone cannot stand if there is nothing supporting it, and that something is Morality, **personal morality** in other words, the prudence, virtue and **ethos** of the therapist. As Th. Tzavaras states, expressing the thoughts of the French Philosopher Paul Ricoeur, "Before the rules for exercising specific professions are codified, either towards people/patients or towards society and the state, in other words, before the framework of professional ethics is laid down, the subject/therapist is called upon to address the need of a more fundamental morality, the reasonable/sapient morality, as he calls it. Ricoeur connects this morality to the Greek virtue of prudence..." (Tzavaras, 1998, p. 75). Before all these Ethics and Codes, ethical obligations and mandates, rules and regulations, before Ethics as an external value system, I would like to contrast the morality of therapists as an **internal value system** with values and virtues that have been experienced, their

therapeutic ethos, which trainee therapists are called upon to develop and cultivate during their training and which will be expressed in their therapeutic attitude. After all, what is psychotherapy if not, first and foremost, a moral attitude before anything else, such as knowledge, theory, technique, method, scientific competence!

And it is precisely this **attitude** of future therapists that Psychotherapy is called upon to activate and cultivate, the position that not only honours and respects other people's pain, their call for help, their request for relief, but also honours and respects the Person behind the disorder and the symptom, the position that facilitates the passage from the actual person to the potential person. Paraphrasing the words of F. Dolto (E. Kouki, 1998, p. 183), I would claim that "Morality means respecting the laws that govern my client's development", i.e. my active effort to provide my clients with suitable conditions for their underlying potential, for their truth to emerge from the suffering subject.

Therefore, in this sense, the morality of trainee therapists, their ethos, comprises an integral part of their **identity** and, as such, must be at the centre of their training. Any ethics can be based and established on this morality otherwise, it will remain an external set of rules, alien and lifeless, which we are simply called upon to comply with, something like the letter of the law, but without its spirit.

Athens, 2008



DIFFERENTIATION & SOCIAL ENTROPY

Petros Theodorou

In order to examine the concept of entropy, let's think of a bulldozer. Have you ever considered the huge amounts of energy required for this massive metal object to move? Or, imagine the bulldozer rolling down a hill - how difficult is it, how much energy is necessary to stop it?

This illustrates the concept of entropy in physics, which reflects **the tendency of a system to preserve its kinetic state. In other words, entropy is the tendency of a system towards a state of balance that**

requires the lowest possible energy consumption (entropy expresses the measure of its "inertia").

A huge effort is required in order to start or stop a bulldozer: the bulldozer seems to "prefer" to remain immobile, or, if it is already rolling, not to stop. According to this definition, if I, an "external" factor, do not do anything, the bulldozer remains still or keeps rolling, if I don't step on the brakes.

Therefore, the more open a system is "externally", the less entropy it develops, since being open means that it receives "external" energy.

If we now turn to human groups, I believe that many consumerist/technocratic societies develop "entropy" as a system of elements tending towards maintaining its status unchanged so as to survive.

But what is the FORM of social entropy? I support that it can be expressed through:

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- (1) a tendency towards **homogeneity** of goals and values.
- (2) **rigidity** (resulting in prejudice, inability to respond to new aspects of social life, etc).

Therefore, based on the entropy that they develop, societies often tend to exorcise change and individual development in order to survive. This is the natural inertia of societies, a tendency for the survival of such large entities.

Now, let's examine How and Why differentiation through psychotherapy can reduce social entropy.

In most forms of psychotherapy, self-support is part of the objectives (in Gestalt therapy, it is the main objective). This means that I become more aware to listening to my needs and being able to do something about them, while respecting my limits and those of others, without depending on other people in dysfunctional ways.

Thus, if one understands their uniqueness and takes responsibility for it, they can bestow meaning on their own life and make more efficient relationship networks for themselves and the environment. One does not have to blindly accept the values of the masses in order to gain an illusion

of security through homogeneity. This is precisely what, inevitably, has social consequences: introducing my uniqueness into the environment, I create new social structures in the micro-universe surrounding me; I inject my own, personal elements into my reality.

I create motion in the web of society. And, finally, I OPEN the system of society from the INSIDE using my own motion AND I supply it with energy through the NEW social networks I create.

Personally, I strongly believe that: **how I live my life, my self-respect, my responsibility for myself that includes respecting and caring for Others, ARE political acts.**

Thus, in conclusion, I believe that personal differentiation through psychotherapy reduces social entropy, since:

it is a way to create new social structures, opposes homogeneity, opposes the rigidity of technocratic/consumerist societies by introducing motion, energy and creativity into their structures.

Adam Harvatis, MSc, PhD
Gestalt and Systemic
Constellation
Psychotherapist

PSYCHOTHERAPY & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Beyond the answers of the past



How can any discussion of the issue of social responsibility in psychotherapy avoid using clichés? Without simply stating what seems self-evident, i.e. that psychotherapy is a particularly socially responsible profession? Without simply repeating once again that, since psychotherapy tries to improve someone as a person, it contributes towards improving society and, therefore, it is a “calling” of particular social responsibility?

Modern developments in psychotherapy (both in Gestalt therapy and other schools of psychotherapy) provide new, more substantial answers that go beyond “therapists must simply do their work properly and that’s enough”, beyond the philanthropic, *pro bono* work of psychotherapists to “distressed” persons, who cannot afford to pay for their services. After all, charity is a double-edged sword, since it usually offers assistance to people, but at the cost of dependence and loss of autonomy.

In my opinion, what answers the question of psychotherapists' social responsibility, in a new and substantial manner, has to do with **how** psychotherapists do their job. This **how** is particularly illustrated by the answers they give to a series of questions. I will refer to just two of these questions.

- Who is the problem? Until recently, psychotherapy gave this answer: the problem is humans themselves and/or their families, which are dysfunctional

and need to recognize and rectify their errors (usually on the basis of norms-criteria set by therapists).

However, we now know that the issues that concern people seeking help actually concern everyone living in modern society and often we all respond to these issues effectively, as well as ineffectively. In group therapy, for example, we have observed the following phenomenon. A person often brings up in the group an issue that concerns his or her life. However, the same issue is expressed in the same way in the 'here and now' life of the group, as experienced by the other members of the group. For example, a group member discusses his or her “inability” to help his or her children and the group often proves “unable” to help the person that brought up the issue. Another example: group members complain about the refusal of certain of their colleagues (outside the group) to accept their responsibilities at work and, at the same time, the group itself has incomplete prior obligations. This phenomenon has been described as a “parallel process” by Gestalt theoreticians and as “resonance” by system theoreticians.

If all of us under suitable conditions face the same issues, isn't it perhaps time to recognize the social nature of “psychological” difficulties and to stop pathologising the person (or the family) and, thus, filling them with guilt? Isn't it time to recognize, as White says, that “the problem is the problem and the person is the person”?

- What is the solution to the problem? So, if difficulties have an intensely social nature, where does the solution to such problems lie? For a long time, since psychotherapy identified the problems of people and their families, it thought the solution lay in rectifying these problems, with intense responsibility and, therefore, power on the part of the therapist for this rectification. However, modern psychotherapy trends (see work with families at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, constructivist and constructionist schools of psychotherapy) recognize that, quite often, people and their families have resisted these problems for a long while before visiting the therapist's office. There are exceptions to the problem, forces and abilities of persons and their families that shape the solutions emerging. Therefore, it is not necessary to rectify the “client”, but to carry out a co-operative “illumination” of his or her unrecognized strong points and resources.

When therapists answer the questions presented above in this manner during the counselling act, they are taking their social duty a step further. Their goal is not to rectify unable families and persons, but to strengthen them in their struggle to transcend these very external definitions, what is ability and what is not, i.e. to transcend the regulatory pressures of a society that wants to constantly define what is normal and what is not. In this way, therapy becomes an act of increased social responsibility, a “political” act starting with a lower case “p”.

ORGANIZATIONS & COUNCELLING GESTALT

Eliana Kynigopoulou



A high-ranking executive of the Organisation visited Nasreddin and asked: why is it that despite the best efforts of our Organisation's administration to keep everyone united, each department follows its own path? "Ah, that's simple!" replied Nasreddin. "If everyone headed in the same direction, this would upset the balance and the organisation would be ruined". We are here at GIO to facilitate the various groups within the Organisation in maintaining the balance between them, to be aware of their identity as a separate being with its own characteristics, desires, emotions and objectives, to improve their personal and professional development, as well as their relations with other groups. The same work takes place and each group member, who is a separate individual with his or her own dynamics, contributes towards shaping the character of the group to which he or she belongs. We motivate the team to function much better than each member would function individually, by clarifying the mission and its objectives and by improving its external and internal relations.

The Gestalt approach to the Organisation concerns the evaluation, planning and implementation of change. The goal is to achieve this change, as people gain cognizance of themselves, their group and the field being shaped around them.

We hear about coaching, mentoring, counselling, organizational development. Where exactly does Gestalt stand among all these? What role does it play in Organisations? How is it unique?

Where Gestalt is unique and effective is when faced with issues of conflict or lack of conflict (consider that if there is no conflict within an Organisation, a group, a family or any other system, there is no progress, there are hidden emotions, things lying in the shadows that are never uttered, fear and incoherence). It is also unique when it comes to issues of internal or external communication, lack of interest at work, goal-setting, defining the characteristics of the group, leadership issues and, of course, the major issue of change. GIO counsellors focus on 'being' and on 'becoming' instead of on 'doing'. They train themselves to use their senses and observe what is happening outside them, around them, in the group and in the Organisation at every moment, in the here and now. Their objective is to have cognizance of themselves, to complete their own half-finished affairs, so as to be able to avoid judging others, to avoid jumping to conclusions and projecting their own beliefs, so as to be constantly present in the group, participating with all their senses.

There is endless change within a group: every moment is different and unique, but major changes in our lives, as in the case of an organisation, take place slowly and with great difficulty. Resistance to change is very strong. Change only comes when we accept the situation we are in. The harder we try to change something, the more it stays the same. Situations only change when we accept them and are aware of where we are, who we are, and what is happening to us. This is the paradox of change.

An example can be found in a person who might be an executive in a company but is afraid of speaking in front of a crowd. A counsellor convinces this person to make a speech,

telling him or her that this way he or she will overcome this feeling of timidity. So, this person decides to go ahead and blocks up with stage-fright, losing his or her composure and feeling even greater shame and fear.

The Gestalt counsellor is called upon to create the ideal conditions in order for change to take place, instead of enforcing this change. Counsellors must help their clients comprehend what they might not be able to see. Often people within organizations recognize a problem but they either don't take it seriously or don't know how to manage it. Such an example is a manager who sees the consequences that poor work relations between a company's departments have on the company, but cannot think about his or her own participation in this situation. We create an environment of security, turn ourselves into instruments of change, participate with all our senses. This is achieved through personal work, continuous training, individual and group psychotherapy.

Consider for a moment your reaction and resistance to change. An organisation works in the same way as a person; it experiences the same resistance. What are the personal changes you recently tried to make in your life? Ask the same question about your enterprise. For example, have you tried to learn a foreign language, to stop smoking, to lose weight, to find a new partner, to make a new purchase, to merge two departments? These are changes that cannot take place overnight. Did you succeed in your attempt? In your view, what made the difference between success and failure? Did someone motivate you to proceed with this change or disappoint you during your effort? Did a significant conversation take place that may have helped you make a decision when

you found yourself at a crossroads? Did you have to address someone's behaviour, who made you believe you could never achieve this change?

Consider your effort and assess how committed you were to your decision to achieve your goal. How much did you really desire this change?

As counsellors, what we do is clarify and comprehend, together, what makes this change take place and what obstructs it. Change means that some things will occur differently and this requires cognizance of our behaviour, thoughts and emotions. Facts do not change, we do. And, don't forget, the door of change only opens from the inside.

I would like to conclude here with a few words by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist teacher, who was nominated for the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize.

"In order to exist, all things depend on all other things. Consider, for a example, a leaf. Earth, water, warmth, the sea, a tree, the sun, time, space, all these elements gave this leaf the possibility of existing. If even one of these elements were absent, the leaf could not have existed. All beings are based on the law of dependent co-appearance, co-existence. The origin of a thing is all things."

Zen is life in the here and now, what Gestalt represents, and in this excerpt, this teacher stresses that all elements interact with each other and are necessary for the creation of the system, the leaf, the whole.

Thank you very much.

Educational Gestalt in Organizations

continuity from page 2

THE GESTALT THERAPIST T throw time

THE THIRD FORCE: EXISTENTIAL AND HUMANISTIC APPROACH

It is called the third force because it was the third one to be accepted by society, after Psychoanalysis and Behaviourism. Its main representatives are CARL ROGERS, with Anthropocentric Therapy, and F. Perls with Gestalt Therapy.

They believe in:

- The DEMOCRATIC IDEAL
- SUBJECTIVITY
- Humans' innate tendency towards MATURITY AND SELF-ACTUALISATION
- The VALUE OF EACH PERSON FOR WHAT HE OR SHE IS
- The VALUE OF AUTHENTIC INTERACTION IN THE PRESENT

All these **paradoxes** that comprise the Gestalt revolution were recognized; life became art and contact became original and Gestalt was ready to present a new way for people to interact with society.

We are equally affected by the past and the future.

Synthesis often precedes analysis.

The surface reveals as much as the hidden depth.

Aggressiveness and anger form a powerful driving force in our lives.

Reinforcing a symptom can help restore health.

Pleasure is more efficient than effort.

How something affects us and what is affecting us are more important than why we are being affected.

And the "then" became "now" and every coming moment is a new "now" with numerous choices that lead to an equal number of futures.

Chaos theory seems to be challenging us. Could it be truly possible that most reasons actually lie in our future? Everything we know comes into question. Why did we sleep early last night? Perhaps because we were tired (so the reason is in the past, or because we wanted to be rested for today's presentation, so the reason is in the future).

Do our goals tug us towards them or is our past pushing us forward?

In Gestalt, we work in the here and now, not for the here and now. It is not that we can immediately satisfy our needs, but that we are present for ourselves in space. Many of our established habits can be reexamined. Our personal experience is not static. We do not perceive it as a separate or distinct point in time. Time is not as important as pace. We need harmony, which is like a melody filling life with joy and effervescence, and this is called love and is love.

We are constantly involved in a process. We are predisposed to move on and continue. As Zinker says, "Life knows only itself. Life tends towards self-actualization".



PROFESSIONAL VOLUNTEERISM & GESTALT

Irene Kiletsi

I would like to salute, in my turn, the day-meeting celebrating the ten years of operation of the Gestalt Foundation. I'm particularly pleased to be here today, having experienced this ten-year journey, initially as a trainee and volunteer and then as a psychotherapist and supervisor of the action I refer to below. For the last year, the Gestalt Foundation has been working with the Northern Greek association of parents and children suffering from diabetes mellitus. This is yet another action taking place within the framework of professional volunteerism and practical training for trainees. Diabetes mellitus and, particularly, Type 1 diabetes, also known as juvenile diabetes, apart from being a chronic disease, mostly concerns children or adolescents. This fact, combined with the chronic nature of the disease, creates a series of issues, concerns and emotions that aren't always clear, that affect one's entire family and social circle. In a sense, this is an issue that concerns all of us.

Within the framework of our cooperation with the association, we held two lectures. The first addressed parents of, mostly, young children, while the second, held during the association's day-meeting titled "Sweet Life during Adolescence" addressed the general public. However, the most important action carried out was the organisation of groups of psychological support, consisting of professional psychologists who volunteered throughout last year. The groups addressed both parents and young people. Individual meetings were also possible.

Although this was the first time such cooperation had taken place, there was great response from the members of the association. Discussion and communication, sharing and realization, not just of the medical consequences but mostly of the psychological consequences, the expression of feelings that concern life with diabetes and their management were some of the greatest benefits, according to participants. Fears, concerns, responsibility, joy, acceptance of the disease, etc. find their place. It is the group process that illuminates the psychological aspect of the issue, which is generally approached from a purely medical viewpoint.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the enthusiasm, good cheer and professionalism of participating colleagues, both in the specific activities and in the supervisory process, expressing everyone's wish for further creative cooperation. This is the way in which we experienced the coupling of psychotherapy and society! Thank you.

GREEK ASSOCIATION OF ALZHEIMER DISEASE AND DELATED DISORDERS

Psychologist MARIA VASSILOGLOU

The Greek Association of Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders (EENASD) was founded in 1995 in Thessaloniki by a group of scientists headed by Ms. Magda Tsolaki. It was based on volunteerism and it is a non-profit organisation.

It currently numbers more than 2,500 members and its professional staff includes neurologists, specialized psychologists, biologists and other discipline specialists. In 1996-97, EENASD became a member of Alzheimer International and Alzheimer European Society. Recently, all its branches throughout Greece were unified and formed the Greek Federation, the President of which is Ms. Magda Tsolaki. In 1997, a quarterly magazine about the disease started being published. In 1998, the rest of its branches were founded throughout Greece and in 2000 the 1st Pan-Hellenic Conference was held in Thessaloniki; since then, the event has been held biannually. At present, we are organizing the 6th Pan-Hellenic Multidisciplinary Conference, which will be held from February 19 to 22, 2009 at GRAND HOTEL in Thessaloniki, while in March 2010 we will

have the pleasure of organizing the World Conference in our city, to which you are all welcomed.

The objective of the society is to provide free services to dementia patients and their caregivers.

Society's services aim at improving its beneficiaries' quality of life, which is achieved through prevention, timely diagnosis and proper selection of treatment options. We provide neuropsychological assessment for patients, which helps diagnosis, monitoring patients during the progress of the disease and checking the effectiveness of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical treatment. We also provide cognitive therapeutic programmes, which aim at combating cognitive degradation in cases of mild dementia and at preserving mental balance in the more serious stages of the disease. The cognitive and psychotherapeutic programmes have provided positive research data on their effectiveness.

In regard to relatives, we provide education on the disease and how to handle everyday life difficulties, as well as psychological support for caregivers and the entire family. We also

provide relaxation technique lessons so they learn how to handle stress. All these services are provided free of charge at the society's Day Centres (Agia Eleni, Charissio and KIFI [Day Care Centres for the Elderly]), as well as the Memory and Dementia Clinic at Papanikolaou Hospital, which is headed by Ms. Tsolaki in cooperation with psychologists and other health professionals. Research on the aetiology of the disease is also undertaken. Since 2001, EENASD has been cooperating with GESTALT Foundation and we consider this cooperation to be important for the psychotherapeutic support of our patients.

The GESTALT method has helped patients suffering from behavioural and psychological problems to be in a better emotional mood, to have better communication with their caregivers and be calmer. It seems that within the framework of GESTALT therapy, our patients gain the opportunity to express and realize their emotions vis-à-vis people and situations and, thus, to realize what is good in their lives. This gives them strength and forms a point of reference amidst the chaos and insecurity they experience within the context of dementia.

A THERAPIST'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Kassiani
Feleki

We all agree with the vision of a fair society, governed by values such as solidarity, mutual understanding, acceptance of differences, care, social responsibility and participation of citizens. However, how are these values shaped? Is their presence in people self-evident? Can we take it for granted?

This is a complex issue where two parameters are involved and interact with each other: the social and the mental. Our mental organisation affects the nature of our involvement in society and, vice versa, the social context influences our affective faculty.

Avoiding the risk of reductionism, I would like to focus on the mental parameter, which is the focus of our profession as therapists. For psychoanalysis, care and understanding, which form the cornerstone of authentic morality, are not a given fact, but a developmental achievement that is evolved and cultivated within the family.

It is primarily the mother (with the father's assistance) that undertakes the basic function of shaping emotional values, the mental bestowal of meaning to human relations, in other words, the creation of mental links with people inside and outside the family.

Humans are born with the capacity for deep, meaningful relationships that emotionally connect us with other people, but it is the mother's capacity to comprehend a child's emotional needs that will allow the child to develop its ability to relate to other people, to comprehend their mental state, to care for others and operate not only the basis of its own needs but the needs of others, as well. The child's ability to bestow meaning to the world and live creatively within it depends on the maternal function. Without all of the above, i.e. without understanding and solidarity, human relations become relationships of power.

Otherwise, we are talking about adaptation of the person, about external enforcement, i.e. a

conventional morality, which, in the best of cases, is enlightened interest and, in the worst, based on fear.

The sense of social responsibility is not enforced by law, but it is organized and developed in the primeval human relationships, within the family. At this age, the dominance of the economic model and the cultural changes it has created lead to a displacement of the values that govern the interpersonal emotional relationships of people.

We witness the subversion of such values and their replacement by values such as money, thirst for power, success, career, publicity, lifestyle, values promoted as promising personal happiness and prosperity through advertising and the media. In this new world order, men and women are invited to take on new roles that bring them in conflict with the parental function, as described above.

Modern psychoanalytic studies link the failure of parental function with increased mental disturbance, crime and substance abuse. The lack of time spent with children, familial instability, emotional, physical and supervisory neglect are linked to an increased risk for personality disorders, depression, failure to socialize and delinquent behaviour. Relevant research predicts a continuous increase of such phenomena in the near future.

In summary, I would support that the demands of modern life hurt the essence of the maternal function, which is to develop in children their capacity to care for their fellow humans, to understand the world and live creatively. The tragedy of modern human beings is condensed in the contradiction that, while we have everything, we cannot draw satisfaction from these things and we experience the lack of meaning as an affective void.

Modern Western civilization is trying to rid itself of this insufficiency through the manic delusion that human relations can be replaced by pills (as

Huxley prophesied in his "Brave New World"), consumption and power.

Our societies are described as manic, since, in their effort to control the complexity of emotional relationships, uncertainty, fear, pain of loss and delusions that are innate in human nature, they promote the acquisition of material goods and individualistic success as the guarantee for happiness.

Faced with this situation, we, mental health professionals, apart from our social responsibility as citizens, have an additional responsibility, through our experience and theoretical processing, to inform society about the risks that modern life entails and to function in an advisory fashion so that measures are taken in order to help families carry out their "mission" in the best way possible.

In regard to the sector of mental health services, the main orientation is to place emphasis on human relations and not just biological approaches and pharmaceutical treatment. In this sense, this day-meeting is an act of social responsibility.

Finally, and most importantly, it is the very work we conduct with our patients. Within the psychoanalytic relationship, the psychoanalyst, undertaking a function similar to the maternal one, tries to comprehend the mental needs of patients, giving them the capacity to feel, perhaps for the first time in their lives, that someone accepts them and tries to understand them. The experience of this different relationship (corrective experience) will allow them to recognize their own participation and to take responsibility in shaping their relations with other people, so as to become incorporated in the network of broader human relations, having the capacity to communicate, understand, care for other people, i.e. to live their lives with meaning and creativity.

In this sense, our therapeutic work is a major act of social responsibility.

PSYCHOTHERAPY & SOCIETY PROFESSIONAL VOLUNTEERISM

ZAFIRIA ANDRIKOU

Graduate of Thessaloniki TEI, Medical Laboratory Technologist,
Volunteer at the Hellenic Multiple Sclerosis Society

Before focusing on volunteerism, I would like to make a connection between Gestalt and volunteerism.

Following a major event in my personal life, I sought help from Gestalt experts.

I attended a self-knowledge group and through this process I discovered my abilities and my limits and managed to accept the ways in which I am different. I learned how to listen and communicate.

During this journey into discovering myself, I felt an intense need to give and investigated the possibility of various volunteer groups. Of all the groups recommended to me, I selected the volunteer group of the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

After attending a volunteer training course organized by Gestalt psychologists, I joined the group.

The patients we visit face mobility problems, so visits take place at their residences.

My first visit was shocking. I don't think I'll ever be able to forget it. The dignity with which these fellow human beings face their situation is unbelievable. They have the power to praise God.

I entered volunteerism in order to give, but I ended up receiving much more than I gave.

I discovered how to look at life differently, how to live meaningfully. I became more optimistic.

I see how happy patients are when we visit them, how eagerly they await us. They consider us their view to the outside world. This honours us and makes us feel that volunteerism requires consistency, continuity and responsibility.

We have developed strong ties with patients and their relatives, who also need support, as well as with other members of the volunteers' group. I have become richer as a person, because I receive something important and different from each person, and I thank them all for that.

Of course, it isn't all that easy. Often, the emotions arising in us are very intense and we cannot handle them. This is why we attend a monthly meeting for psychological support. This task is undertaken in an excellent manner by Ms. Ramma Sadmon and, thus, the journey towards self-knowledge continues.

In closing, I would like to encourage you to become volunteers, serving a cause suitable for you.

Thank you.

AN INVITATION AND A CHALLENGE

Katerina Siambani

10 years of the Gestalt Foundation

In 2001, Gestalt Foundation began working with the Greek Association of Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders. In 2005, on September 21, on the World Alzheimer's Day, the Association celebrated the 10th anniversary of its founding. Approximately three years later, on October 12, 2008, Gestalt Foundation celebrated the 10th anniversary of its founding. Therefore, I would say that we have been fellow travellers in our efforts to combat a disease that afflicts approximately 5.4 million citizens within the European Union.

In Greece alone, there are 141,000 people suffering from some sort of dementia and this number tends to increase due to the aging of the population in all EU Member States. Researchers predict that these numbers will have doubled by 2040 in Western Europe and tripled in Eastern Europe.

During these 8 years of cooperation, many of us trainees and alumni of Gestalt Foundation have come into contact with the "world of dementia" within the framework of the practical experience part of our training. When I was asked by the Gestalt Foundation to speak here today about this experience, two words came to mind.

An invitation and a challenge. The invitation was extended to us both by Gestalt Foundation and by the Greek Association of Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders. This invitation reflects the trust, support and participation of all of us who responded to it at lectures, at groups providing psychological support to caregivers and patients, at supervision sessions, at Conferences and in cooperation with the Scientific Committee of the Greek Association of Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders all this time.

The challenge concerns the fact that we were invited to test the application of Gestalt psychotherapy in an unknown and relative demanding field, as dementia does not simply block a person's ability to remember names and faces, to schedule their work or to make calculations – it gradually removes their personality, their cognitive functions and their favourite memories.

Everyone involved in psychotherapy knows that a prerequisite condition for the participation of a person in the psychotherapeutic process is a sound mental state and the ability to communicate and process information. In this light, one could claim that the application of any psychotherapeutic intervention for people facing the loss of such important faculties as memory, attention and concentration is impossible.

Nevertheless, examining the relevant literature, we discovered that several others before us worked on psychotherapeutic interventions for people facing significant loss of cognitive faculties and encouraged and supported the benefits of psychotherapy – in other words, what we ascertained, in general, from our experience, too: psychotherapeutic intervention that takes into account the mental loss of the person and adapts to them can benefit our clients by helping them manage the fears and anxiety they are experiencing. The goals of psychotherapy in these cases could include helping persons suffering from dementia to cultivate their sense of identity, to express their feelings, to gain emotional support from the therapist (and/or other members of the group, when the psychotherapeutic intervention takes place in a group setting) and to maintain their current mental faculties.

Furthermore, the challenge concerns the application of psychotherapeutic intervention programmes for caregivers of dementia patients. This is because most

of them are senior citizens who are called upon by the circumstances to provide care to their spouse suffering from dementia. The challenge in this case concerns, in my view, a stereotypical perception I often witness, i.e. that it is impossible or futile to practise psychotherapy for the elderly. Their resistance and perceptions are fixed and rigid. And this is a fact.

On the other hand, there is the fact of caring for a dementia patient, which is a tough, demanding and painful process, often leading to the physical and emotional exhaustion of caregivers. The demanding nature of caring for these patients forces family members to assume an important functional role that often requires full-time attention and huge amounts of mental strength from the caregiver. For this reason, caregivers need intervention, as their mental health should be considered as important as their physical health, since the health of the patients they look after depends on the care their caregivers provide.

We had the good fortune of being able to apply Gestalt psychotherapy to groups of caregivers. We presented our observations from this experience at the 9th European Conference of Gestalt Therapy. It was a rich, difficult and demanding process and, at the same time, particularly important for caregivers. Despite the difficulty, I would be willing to do it all over again, because caregivers need support in order to handle the feelings they experience and psychological support in order to negotiate with themselves the undertaking of full responsibility for the patient, to accept their differences and to relieve at least part of the emotional pressure that they themselves experience.

In conclusion, I would like to read an excerpt from a letter I received in early September 2006 from a member of the caregiver group that we organized back then with Dimitra Zioga, my good colleague and associate. The lady who sent me the letter participated unflinchingly in the meetings during the three years the group lasted and looks after her husband, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease. For ethical reasons, I will not mention her name and I should state that I have her consent for reading this excerpt.

"... At this moment, I sit before an amazing landscape, where all I have been able to see throughout the summer has been a green expanse of trees and a sea that today seems sullen. In the horizon there is Mt. Chortiatis and the line of the poor, burnt peninsula of Chalkidiki. I only look at the sea, I haven't touched its waters for years and I have promised myself, if God grants me the years and the health, to rent a house by the sea one day and remain forever in her embrace – such are the dreams of a seventy-year-old. I wish I had thought of these moments, the difficult ones, when I was young, but youth is so carefree! Perhaps I would have done more for myself throughout my life, and this does not mean that I regret any of what I have given.

At times, I dream of being in the busy city and, at others, I love my solitude, because I think, not pessimistically, but optimistically, full of love for people and sorrow for their troubles, which are bigger than my own...

I think of you with love and long to be near you, to feel the warmth of the love that connected us, to hear your voice, to feel joy for your joys and compassion for your sadness...

I may have tired you, jumping from one topic to another, but my mood is swinging, too, isn't it? My feelings are joy and sadness together, as somebody said. Consider this letter as my need to speak to someone, as I have spoken so little this summer. I am free and, at the same time, confined in a prison with invisible but impermeable bars.

Thank you for listening to me once again.

Until we meet again, thank you for everything."

CORRESPONDENCE...



CORRESPONDENCE...

Experiencing the present is one of the many things that distinguishes Gestalt psychotherapy and makes me happy and an ardent supporter of this discipline. But what does it mean to live in the present, in the 'here and now'? And how can this act therapeutically? I have no answers, but I can share how I experience all this. After all, I agree with Fritz Perls, who supports that learning is a process of discovery. So, here are my personal findings. I believe that being able to let yourself go in the process of the moment

THE ART OF THE MOMENT

without thinking about what has happened or what will follow is a supreme venture – to simply be involved in the process. "Letting go" requires that I trust what will happen. None of us knows or has been trained to live life at the moment when it happens. On the contrary, we are all permanently lost in our expectations of the future and it is this waiting that ends up stealing all of our energy, with us living in expectation of something that we, ultimately, do not know. At other times, we are so attached to the past that we ignore the treasure hidden in the now and we forget to live.

The Greek word "oraio", meaning "good" or "beautiful", etymologically means what comes at its time or hour ("ora"). Anything that doesn't come at its time is not good. And I wonder, based on the above, if our concerns, our expectations, our anxieties, or 'what

ifs' and our fears belong to the now or simply occur because we are not in the now.

This is where the Gestalt therapist challenges his or her client to focus on the now, on what the client is feeling at the given moment – and that is when everything changes and takes on a different meaning... I believe it is a blessing for therapists to have such a powerful weapon in their therapeutic toolkit. It is in the moment that one discovers inspiration – and that is what allows one to move forward.

So, **HERE AND NOW**, life calls on us to live in awareness, to live it at its time and not before or after!

KYRIAKI SAOULI

Gestalt Foundation Trainee, in her 2nd year of training

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