

GESTALT THERAPY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAM 2023

For: Blagica Rzoska Vanikj

Third Year Assignment

THE CREATIVITY IN GESTALT THERAPY

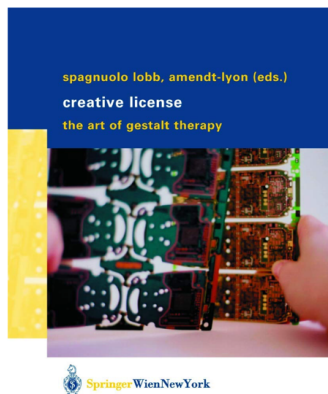
Seda Usubütün

February 2025

THE CREATIVITY IN GESTALT THERAPY

Seda Usubütün

Starting with the question on my mind: "[Where the creativity lies in Gestalt therapy practice and theory?](#)", I come up with various ideas from well-known Gestalt scholars, some of them compiled under an edited book by Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb and Nancy Amendt-Lyon, (2003) *Creative License: The Art of Gestalt Therapy*. Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb based this book project on the idea that creativity is considered in Gestalt therapy to be [a quality of spontaneous adaptation in interpersonal processes](#) and not seen as a quality of remarkable and exceptional personalities.



Nancy Amendt-Lyon (2003) emphasizes "Merely encouraging play and artistic production as a therapist, or working with a client who exhibits exceptional artistic talents, does not adequately define creativity within the therapeutic relationship." According to her, "more appropriate definition of this type of creativity must include [interpersonal aspects](#)" where she delicately mentions the aspects such as the "[daring, creative interaction, or that which happens in the no man's land between us.](#)" Self-expression in itself where the interpersonal space between the client and the therapist is not in the equation does not count as a creative exchange. The [curiosity and willingness to experiment on both sides](#) is necessary for a creative interaction.

Still, [a background or a continued engagement with art](#) has influential effects on the psychotherapist. In terms of communicative abilities and understanding multifaceted personalities, involvement with a form of art [enhances the insight of the therapist of human nature](#). In practice, engagement with art can help with

"the art of grasping the larger picture,
zooming in on a detail and putting it into perspective,
perceiving a situation from various and contrasting viewpoints,
acquiring a sense of atmospheres and moods,
imagining what it is like to "slip into the skin" of another person, and

delighting in the incredible uniqueness of every human being" (Amendt-Lyon, 2003)

Joseph Zinker (1977) is an important theoretician in Gestalt and in his writings he warns psychotherapists about the *pitfalls of stereotyped, repetitive exercises*, and he strongly advises the *spontaneous creation of custom-made experiments*. Zinker declares his position as:

Gestalt therapy is "*permission to be creative*" !

Chapter by Antonio Sichera (2003, Eds/ Lobb and Amendt-Lyon), mentions a syntactical problem inherent in Gestalt therapy about the use of creativity as an essential attribute of the experience of *contact (as an adjective) rather than as a noun*; also emphasizes the creativity in relationships and he proceeds from this basis to an analysis of *dreams and art*.

Holding to those insights as my way of exploring the creativity in Gestalt practice I decided to focus on *dream work* in Gestalt therapy and while doing that I used the concepts of *creative adaptations* and *creative indifference* in gestalt theory as my wide-angled glasses.

I had a dream in March 8th, 2024

I'm in a familiar house that is not mine. I enter a room where there is a kid sitting on the ground and playing with his toys. Someone is taking care of him and this person asks me to take her place for a while cause she needs to be somewhere else. She is a relative of mine, I cannot recognize specifically and by her name but I know her and the kid somehow. I agree to stay with the kid. First thing I do is to check the room for possible dangers to the kid that I should be aware when I'm fulfilling my new responsibility to look after him. The room is simple, a bed, carpet from wall to wall on the ground, no sharp objects around but a window space on the wall. I call it a space cause there are no frames or glasses at the window hole which is quite large in size and fortunately located at a higher surface of the wall. Then I start watching the kid playing with his toy train. The kid is somewhat older now, around 4 years old, the toy also becomes bigger and now the kid is riding the train. The rails are all around the ground rising high on the walls towards the window and before I can do anything the kid rides the train outside of the window. He leaves the room!

I'm at the street now, following the kid. I cannot call him by his name cause I don't remember. I just shout him to stop and wait for me and we need to go back home. He does not listen. He's growing older all through this dream time, now he is 6-7 years old. He runs towards the traffic and turns left towards the tunnel of the underpass. He shouldn't go into the tunnel, it may be dangerous for him, but he disregards me and goes into the tunnel.

A man appears on the street, again a familiar person for me and a related person to the child to whom I instantly assign the responsibility of the kid (his father?) but the kid also does not listen to him. I tell him (weirdly) not to follow the kid (certainly the kid needs to learn a lesson for not obeying the grown-ups) and come with me to the

house where the kid will eventually find his way back. I persuade the man to follow me (or he chooses to follow me).

We walk towards the home but something is strange, there are so many buildings around on our way back home and I cannot find my way easily as I imagined. I'm clearly lost and we are at a junction where we need to turn left or right. I sense the house is on the left but the man wants to go right. He has lost his confidence in me and asks me to go with him, his way. I'm in confusion about which way to go and then I see there is a sea shore ahead of me which is so attractive and appealing, thus I walk towards the sea. I walk on the sands and reach the sea and sit there, have my feet in the water and I feel peaceful. I forget about the man, the house, the child and I'm just by myself, feeling the water under my feet and the sun on my face.

When I look right I see the kid (10-12 years old now) coming towards me with some grown-ups around. The man is also on the shore, watching us from a near distance. I hug the kid, I say I'm sorry that I stopped following him in the tunnel, I shouldn't have left him alone. And he tells me that it's OK. Eventually we have found each other.

In classical theory of Gestalt, **the dream is the projection of parts of the self**. The client has to repossess these parts with the help of the therapist. Sichera (2003), states that "Perls puts great stress on this element in his therapeutic practice: the **assumption of responsibility in the face of the dream**." And Sichera (2003) continues: "Much later, Isadore From was to put forward the proposal of integrating the classic idea: **reading the "dreamed" dream during therapy as a form of retroflexion**, and hence as a message about the relationship with the therapist, which the client must be able to verbalize and in any case express in the setting." The work on the dream, together with the therapist, **puts the dream itself into the domain of the relationship**. "The dream is not, then, to be thought of as the content produced by the subject's unconscious, nor by the collective imagination, but as *a pure aesthetic form to be listened to and developed together*." (Sichera, 2003)

Being aware of those ideas about the **dream to be a projection of the parts** of myself and that I have to repossess in the presence of my therapist; moreover, the fact that when I dreamed about my dream in therapy room, that **portrayal of my dream will be a part of my relationship with my therapist**; in my session with my personal therapist, we decided to experiment with these ideas and develop the dream together in a deep dive, creative manner.

What my parts were experiencing while I was dreaming about my dream?

Me as **the woman** in my dream:

*I experience the tension between 'taking responsibility' and 'getting back home' all through the sequence until I'm lost in this conflict. First I transfer the responsibility of the child to the man appeared at the right moment of the dream. The moment when the child was not hearing my warnings about how dangerous the tunnel might be and was determined to go after his own needs to play, to discover, and to be free of any adult instructions. **The child wasn't hearing me and I wasn't hearing the child**. Then I weirdly persuade the man also to come with me to the safety of home and support me*

*in my need -not the child's-. Finally I get lost on the way home, lost the man's confidence in me and when I was just about to accept a total failure in myself, I've found a magnificent seashore, **relieved from my tension and stripped of all my worries**. In that seashore (**the fertile void**) I found peace and I found the gift of being united with the child again. Except the resolution part of my dream (that was really surprising for me also) me as the woman in my dream was very familiar to me, it was my **'road much traveled'**.*

Me as **the child** in my dream:

*I am so playful and joyful and contained with my guardians around. However I want more of my freedom, I need to go outside of this house, **I want to go to places I haven't been before, I want to explore, to discover more in my environment. I don't want to be interrupted while playing or stopped while trying new things**. There is said to be **risks** that I have no clue about other than being told so. Maybe I'll slowly make sense of them while I'm taking ages but still I need to disregard them for the moment. This tunnel is not scary for me, it may be a little dark inside but I wonder about where it will lead me to. All sorts of joy and play are waiting for me on the other side of the tunnel. And you see I'm right, I find my way to the seashore, meet my loved ones, and it was hell of an adventure! (**road not taken**)*

Me as **the man** in my dream:

*I'm good at adapting to circumstances, I flow with the events, I can change lanes when I face obstructions and create a new path on this new lane. (**creative adjustment**) For the sake of being in her dream, I can support that woman in her need to find her way back home and **I don't know much about the child and his needs** so I'd better accompany the woman. She, however, does not seem to know clearly where she is headed so at some point I may need to differentiate from her. I may provide her some alternative paths from my past experience however it is going to be her choice whether to stay in her tension or to try a new path. I'm delighted to see in the end that she managed to resolve her obsession with home.*

Together with my therapist we shared a **co-constructed meaning** of my dream. We defined:

my road much traveled (the woman),

the road not taken (the child) and

finding the unfamiliar, undifferentiated creative indifference point (The seashore)

with the help of the inner support system, the therapist (the man).

All constituted the complementary parts of my self-unity.

To recall a few words about *creative indifference* from Gestalt scholars might be helpful here. In Lobb edited book, Ludwig Frambach (2003) offers an account of **Salomo Friedlaender's theory of creative indifference**, which influenced **Fritz Perls' concept of polarities and the notion of a fertile void that bears the possibility of differentiation between interrelated poles in constant tension**.

For Friedlaender, the indifferentiation takes place at the internal part of the subject, the "evacuation of the self from differences" (in Frambach, 2003). The indifferentiation of one's

own awareness is a releasing of all differentiated contents of awareness, until an indifferent clarity of the mind can be achieved. *It is the disidentification from all that one "pseudo-identifies"*. If someone is in any way still identified with something differentiated or external, to which feelings and thoughts also belong, then he failed to find himself, because "at first, indifference is the naked soul, the human soul. The psychological differences relate to the soul as clothes relate to limbs" (in Frambach, 2003).

This indifference point however is not about withdrawal from the world, but about active, creative production of the world, beginning in its intellectual, creative center. The creative art of life that arises from the indifferent center, consists principally in a balance of polar opposites. It is important not to be absorbed one-sidedly and distortedly by one of the respective poles, but to center oneself within the creative center of the poles and, like a bird, to move both of them as if they were wings. (in Frambach, 2003).

In Fritz Perls' writings, Friedlaender's basic concepts, of indifference and polar differentiation, can be found reflected in terms such as middle, center, zero-point, naught, void, pre-difference, equilibrium, balance, centering, opposites, poles, and polarization.

"The basic philosophy of Gestalt therapy is that of nature - differentiation and integration. Differentiation by itself leads to polarities. As dualities these polarities will easily fight and paralyze one another. By integrating opposite traits we make the person whole again. For instance, weakness and bullying integrate as silent firmness" (Perls, in Stevens, 1977).

A product of my dream work with my therapist is this composite photo below, that I've made after those sessions. In that photo which I named 'road not taken' portrays my experience of the dream as a whole, containing the parts of myself- the woman-the man-the child-; the polarities of night and day, city and seashore, responsibilities and play, home and outside, safe and uncanny, present and past. The family photo I've added to that dream photo is from my developmental history, my aunt and me when I was two years old. While composing that photocollage my process of dream work had been continuing and led me to the breaking point in my childhood (12 years by then) when I've lost my aunt, my precious play friend and my creative adjustment aid for the life-scape I was embedded in those days of my childhood. Hence the child that disappears in the tunnel stands for the road not taken in my present life.



Road Not Taken, Seda Usubütün, 2024

As stated before: In making a photography or in therapy, creativity is *"the art of grasping the larger picture, zooming in on a detail and putting it into perspective, perceiving a situation from various and contrasting viewpoints, acquiring a sense of atmospheres and moods, imagining what it is like to "slip into the skin" of another person, and delighting in the incredible uniqueness of every human being"*

How to co-create in the therapy

Back to Sichera (2003), creativity 'as a noun' may not be defined in Gestalt Therapy; but it is implicitly stated that all that "happens" in the field, in relation to the contact, is in itself "creative", because without the *creative contribution of the subjects involved*, there is no contact, no experience, no relationship.

Nancy Amendt-Lyon (2003) advises us, as therapists, to distinguish the sensory strengths of our clients.

They may be oriented **visually** in terms of images, shapes, colors, and designs;

Or may be receptive of **auditory** signals, sounds, music;

or may be receptive to **spatial** modes of communication and need interaction involving directions, movement, and space.

Still some others may communicate **verbally** in **metaphoric terms** or enjoy playing with figures of speech.

Thus it is important to address our clients orientations and matching them with appropriate therapeutic interventions.

Finally, in terms of interventions, **the goal is to bring something novel into the foreground** in order for a new configuration to emerge out of the transformation or reorganization of the old elements. Nancy Amendt-Lyon (2003) provides us a list of guidelines for promoting creative aspects in therapy:

alternating between **verbal and nonverbal** expressive forms, such as painting or pantomime;

alternately using the **dominant and nondominant** hand in drawing - for example, working with self-portraits drawn with each hand, respectively;

stressing the need for space to **play in the therapeutic situation**, such as experimenting with new behaviors or enacting fantasies in the safe environment of the therapist's office;

remembering the parallels between the creative and therapeutic processes, especially the need for **chaos and disorganization of the poorly organized field** before reorganization can take place and appropriate, "good form" can emerge;

playing with and **integrating polarities**, such as reowning those personality aspects that an individual is accustomed to delegate to a partner instead of embodying him or herself; and,

describing an experience in one particular sense medium in terms of another medium, for instance, dancing a dream or painting one's present mood.

In summary

Creativeness lies at the heart of gestalt therapy theory and practice.

It is a quality of spontaneous adaptation in interpersonal processes

It is an essential attribute of the experience of contact

It happens in the no man's land between us (I-Thou)

The dream in Gestalt is a pure aesthetic form to be listened to and developed together

The creative art of life *arises from the indifferent center*

Fertile void bears the possibility of differentiation between interrelated poles in constant tension.

As Zinker says: Gestalt therapy is "*permission to be creative*" !

REFERENCES

Antonio Sichera (2003) *Therapy as an Aesthetic Issue: Creativity, Dreams, and Art in Gestalt Therapy*. In Lobb and Amendt-Lyon Eds. *Creative License: The Art of Gestalt Therapy*. Springer-Verlag Wien New York in 2003

Ludwig Frambach. (2003) *The Weighty World of Nothingness: Salomo Friedlaender's "Creative Indifference"*. In Lobb and Amendt-Lyon Eds. *Creative License: The Art of Gestalt Therapy*. Springer-Verlag Wien New York in 2003

Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb and Nancy Amendt-Lyon. (2003) *Creative License: The Art of Gestalt Therapy*. Springer-Verlag Wien New York in 2003

Nancy Amendt-Lyon (2003) *Toward a Gestalt Therapeutic Concept for Promoting Creative Process*. In Lobb and Amendt-Lyon Eds. *Creative License: The Art of Gestalt Therapy*. Springer-Verlag Wien New York in 2003

Perls FS (1966) Gestalt therapy and human potentialities. In: Stevens JO (ed)(1977) *gestalt is*. Bantam, New York, pp 1-8

Zinker J (1977) *Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy*. Brunner/Mazel, New York