

Gestalt



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Gestalt is a psychology term which means “ unified whole”. It refers to theories of visual perception developed by German psychologists in the 1920s. These theories attempt to describe how people tend to organize visual elements into groups or unified wholes when certain principles are applied.

Similarity occurs when objects look similar to one another. People often perceive them as a group or pattern. When similarity occurs, an object can be emphasized if it is dissimilar to the others. This is called anomaly.

Continuation occurs when the eye is compelled to move through one object and continue to another object. Closure occurs when an object is incomplete or a space is not completely enclosed. If enough of the shape is indicated, people perceive the whole by filling in the missing information. Proximity occurs when elements are placed close together. They tend to be perceived as a group. The eye differentiates an object from its surrounding area. a form, silhouette, or shape is naturally perceived as (object), while the surrounding area is perceived as ground (background).

Balancing and ground can make the perceived image clearer. Using unusual /ground relationships can add interest and subtlety to an image.

Gestalt is also known as the “ Law of Simplicity” or the “ Law of Pragnanz” (the entire or configuration), which states that every stimulus is perceived in its most simple form.

Gestalt theorists followed the basic principle that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, the whole (a picture, a car) carried a different and altogether greater meaning than its individual components (paint, canvas, brush; or tire, paint, metal, respectively). In viewing the “

whole,” a cognitive process takes place – the mind makes a leap from comprehending the parts to realizing the whole,

We visually and psychologically attempt to make order out of chaos, to create harmony or structure from seemingly disconnected bits of information.

The prominent founders of Gestalt theory are Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Kohler, and Kurt Koffka.

This principle shows our perceptual tendency to separate whole s from their backgrounds based on one or more of a number of possible variables, such as contrast, color, size, etc.

A simple composition may have only one . In a complex composition there will be several things to notice. As we look from one to another they each become in turn.

Other times the relationship is unstable, meaning it is difficult to pick out the from the ground. Rarely, the relationship is ambiguous, meaning that the could be the ground or vice-versa.

Camouflage is the deliberate alteration of -ground so that the blends into the ground.

During the Gulf War, all tanks had to be repainted from a woodland camouflage pattern to a desert camouflage pattern because camouflage is terrain specific. That specificity is also evident when one goes to purchase

camouflage clothing; it comes in several patterns, each best suited to particular environments or seasons.

Camouflage material may have a single color, or it may have several similarly colored patches mixed together. The reason for using this sort of pattern is that it is visually disruptive. The meandering lines of the mottled camouflage pattern help hide the contour — the outline — of the body. When you look at a piece of mottled camouflage in a matching environment, your brain naturally “ connects” the lines of the colored blotches with the lines of the trees, ground, leaves and shadows. This affects the way you perceive and recognize the person or object wearing that camouflage.

Grant Wood helped develop the US military’s camouflage during World War I.

Gestalt theory states that things which share visual characteristics such as shape, size, color, texture, or value will be seen as belonging together in the viewer’s mind.

In the graphic below, the viewer is likely to discern a shape in the middle, though each individual object is the same color.

- Repetition of forms or colors in a composition is pleasing in much the same way rhythm is pleasing in music the forms aren’t necessarily identical – there may be tremendous variety within the repetition, yet the correspondence will still be discernable.
- Like static and dynamic tension a deliberate use of similarity in composition can impart meaning to the viewer that is independent of the subject matter of the image.

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- Similarity or repetition in an image often has connotations of harmony and interrelatedness, or rhythm and movement.

The Gestalt law of proximity states that “ objects or shapes that are close to one another appear to form groups”. Even if the shapes, sizes, and objects are radically different, they will appear as a group if they are close together. Also called “ grouping,” the principle concerns the effect generated when the collective presence of the set of elements becomes more meaningful than their presence as separate elements.

Gestalt psychology or gestaltism (German: Gestalt – “ form” or “ whole”) of the Berlin School is a theory of mind and brain positing that the operational principle of the brain is holistic, parallel, and analog, with self-organizing tendencies. The Gestalt effect refers to the form-forming capability of our senses, particularly with respect to the visual recognition of parts and whole forms instead of just a collection of simple lines and curves. In psychology, gestaltism is often opposed to structuralism and Wundt. Often, the phrase “ The whole is greater than the sum of the parts” is used when explaining Gestalt theory.

The concept of Gestalt was first introduced in contemporary philosophy and psychology by Christian von Ehrenfels (a member of the School of Brentano). The idea of Gestalt has its roots in theories by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Immanuel Kant, and Ernst Mach. Max Wertheimer’s unique contribution was to insist that the “ Gestalt” is perceptually primary, defining the parts of which it was composed, rather than being a secondary quality that emerges from those parts, as von Ehrenfels’s earlier Gestalt-Qualität had been.

Both von Ehrenfels and Edmund Husserl seem to have been inspired by Mach's work *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen* (Contributions to the Analysis of the Sensations, 1886), in formulating their very similar concepts of Gestalt and Figural Moment, respectively.

Early 20th century theorists, such as Kurt Koffka, Max Wertheimer, and Wolfgang Köhler (students of Carl Stumpf) saw objects as perceived within an environment according to all of their elements taken together as a global construct. This 'gestalt' or 'whole form' approach sought to define principles of perception — seemingly innate mental laws which determined the way in which objects were perceived.

These laws took several forms, such as the grouping of similar, or proximate, objects together, within this global process. Although Gestalt has been criticized for being merely descriptive, it has formed the basis of much further research into the perception of patterns and objects (Carlson et al. 2000), and of research into behavior, thinking, problem solving and psychopathology.

It should also be emphasized that Gestalt psychology is distinct from Gestalt psychotherapy. One has little to do with the other.

The investigations developed at the beginning of the 20th century, based on traditional scientific methodology, divided the object of study into a set of elements that could be analyzed separately with the objective of reducing the complexity of this object. Contrary to this methodology, the school of Gestalt practiced a series of theoretical and methodological principles that attempted to redefine the approach to psychological research.

The theoretical principles are the following:

- * Principle of Totality - The conscious experience must be considered globally (by taking into account all the physical and mental aspects of the individual simultaneously) because the nature of the mind demands that each component be considered as part of a system of dynamic relationships.
- * Principle of psychophysical isomorphism - A correlation exists between conscious experience and cerebral activity.

Based on the principles above the following methodological principles are defined:

- * Phenomenon Experimental Analysis - In relation to the Totality Principle any psychological research should take as a starting point phenomena and not be solely focused on sensory qualities.
- * Biotic Experiment - The School of Gestalt established a need to conduct real experiments which sharply contrasted with and opposed classic laboratory experiments. This signified experimenting in natural situations, developed in real conditions, in which it would be possible to reproduce, with higher fidelity, what would be habitual for a subject.

The key principles of Gestalt systems are emergence, reification, multistability and invariance.

Emergence

Emergence is demonstrated by the perception of the Dog Picture, which depicts a Dalmatian dog sniffing the ground in the shade of overhanging trees. The dog is not recognized by first identifying its parts (feet, ears, nose,

tail, etc.), and then inferring the dog from those component parts. Instead, the dog is perceived as a whole, all at once. However, this is a description of what occurs in vision and not an explanation. Gestalt theory does not explain how the percept of a dog emerges.

Reification

Reification is the constructive or generative aspect of perception, by which the experienced percept contains more explicit spatial information than the sensory stimulus on which it is based.

For instance, a triangle will be perceived in picture A, although no triangle has actually been drawn. In pictures B and D the eye will recognize disparate shapes as “belonging” to a single shape, in C a complete three-dimensional shape is seen, where in actuality no such thing is drawn.

Reification can be explained by progress in the study of illusory contours, which are treated by the visual system as “real” contours.

Invariance

Invariance is the property of perception whereby simple geometrical objects are recognized independent of rotation, translation, and scale; as well as several other variations such as elastic deformations, different lighting, and different component features. For example, the objects in A in the are all immediately recognized as the same basic shape, which are immediately distinguishable from the forms in B. They are even recognized despite perspective and elastic deformations as in C, and when depicted using different graphic elements as in D. Computational theories of vision, such as

those by David Marr, have had more success in explaining how objects are classified.

Emergence, reification, multistability, and invariance are not separable modules to be modeled individually, but they are different aspects of a single unified dynamic mechanism.[citation needed]

The fundamental principle of gestalt perception is the law of prägnanz (German for pithiness) which says that we tend to order our experience in a manner that is regular, orderly, symmetric, and simple. Gestalt psychologists attempt to discover refinements of the law of prägnanz, and this involves writing down laws which hypothetically allow us to predict the interpretation of sensation, what are often called “gestalt laws”.[1] These include:

Law of Proximity

- * Law of Closure — The mind may experience elements it does not perceive through sensation, in order to complete a regular (that is, to increase regularity).
- * Law of Similarity — The mind groups similar elements into collective entities or totalities. This similarity might depend on relationships of form, color, size, or brightness.
- * Law of Proximity — Spatial or temporal proximity of elements may induce the mind to perceive a collective or totality.
- * Law of Symmetry (ground relationships)— Symmetrical images are perceived collectively, even in spite of distance.

- * Law of Continuity — The mind continues visual, auditory, and kinetic patterns.
- * Law of Common Fate — Elements with the same moving direction are perceived as a collective or unit.
- * Gestalt psychologists find it is important to think of problems as a whole. Max Wertheimer considered thinking to happen in two ways: productive and reproductive.[1]
- * Productive thinking- is solving a problem with insight.
- * This is a quick insightful unplanned response to situations and environmental interaction.
- * Reproductive thinking-is solving a problem with previous experiences and what is already known. (1945/1959).
- * This is a very common thinking. For example, when a person is given several segments of information, he/she deliberately examines the relationships among its parts, analyzes their purpose, concept, and totality, he/she reaches the “ aha!” moment, using what is already known. Understanding in this case happens intentionally by reproductive thinking.
- * Other Gestalts psychologist Perkins believes insight deals with three processes:
 - 1) Unconscious leap in thinking. [1].
 - 2) The increased amount of speed in mental processing.

3) The amount of short-circuiting which occurs in normal reasoning. [2]

* Other views going against the Gestalt psychology are:

1) Nothing-Special View

2) Neo-Gestalts View

3) The Three-Process View

* Gestalt laws continue to play an important role in current psychological research on vision. For example, the object-based attention hypothesis[3] states that elements in a visual scene are first grouped according to Gestalt principles; consequently, further attentional resources can be allocated to particular objects.

* Gestalt psychology should not be confused with the Gestalt therapy of Fritz Perls, which is only peripherally linked to Gestalt psychology. A strictly Gestalt psychology-based therapeutic method is Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy, developed by the German Gestalt psychologist and psychotherapist Hans-Jürgen Walter.

The Gestalt laws are used in user interface design. The laws of similarity and proximity can, for example, be used as guides for placing radio buttons. They may also be used in designing computers and software for more intuitive human use. Examples include the design and layout of a desktop's shortcuts in rows and columns. Gestalt psychology also has applications in computer vision for trying to make computers " see" the same things as humans do.

In some scholarly communities, such as cognitive psychology and computational neuroscience, Gestalt theories of perception are criticized for being descriptive rather than explanatory in nature. For this reason, they are viewed by some as redundant or uninformative. For example, Bruce, Green & Georgeson[4] conclude the following regarding Gestalt theory's influence on the study of visual perception:

“ The physiological theory of the Gestaltists has fallen by the wayside, leaving us with a set of descriptive principles, but without a model of perceptual processing. Indeed, some of their “ laws” of perceptual organisation today sound vague and inadequate. What is meant by a “ good” or “ simple” shape, for example?”

1. ^ a b c Sternberg, Robert, Cognitive Psychology Third Edition, Thomson Wadsworth© 2003.

2. ^ Langley& associates, 1987; Perkins, 1981; Weisberg, 1986, 1995”>

3. ^ Scholl, B. J. (2001). Objects and attention: The state of the art. Cognition, 80(1-2), 1-46.

4. ^ Bruce, V., Green, P. & Georgeson, M. (1996). Visual perception: Physiology, psychology and ecology (3rd ed.). LEA. pp. 110.

Gestalt therapy is an existential and experiential psychotherapy that focuses on the individual's experience in the present moment, the therapist-client relationship, the environmental and social contexts in which these things take place, and the self-regulating adjustments people make as a result of the overall situation. It emphasizes personal responsibility. Gestalt therapy

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was co-founded by Fritz Perls, Laura Perls and Paul Goodman in the 1940s-1950s.

Edwin Nevis described Gestalt therapy as “...a conceptual and methodological base from which helping professionals can craft their practice” (Nevis, E., 2000, p. 3). In the same volume Joel Latner asserted that Gestalt therapy is built around two central ideas: that the most helpful focus of psychology is the experiential present moment and that everyone is caught in webs of relationships; thus, it is only possible to know ourselves against the background of our relation to other things (Latner, 2000). The historical development (see below) of Gestalt therapy shows the influences that have resulted in these two foci. Expanded, they result in the four chief theoretical constructs (see below under the theory and practice section) that comprise Gestalt theory and guide the practice and application of Gestalt therapy.

Gestalt therapy was forged from various influences in the times and lives of the founders: physics, Eastern religion, existential phenomenology, Gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, theatrical performance, systems and field theory (Mackewn, 1997).

Gestalt therapy rose from its beginnings in the middle of the 20th century to rapid and widespread popularity during the decade of the 1960s and early 1970s. During the 70s and 80s Gestalt therapy training centers spread globally, but they were, for the most part, not aligned with formal academic settings. As the cognitive revolution eclipsed Gestalt therapy in psychology, many came to believe Gestalt was an anachronism. In the hands of Gestalt

practitioners, Gestalt therapy became an applied discipline in the fields of psychotherapy, organizational development, social action, and eventually coaching. Until the turn of the century Gestalt therapists disdained the positivism underlying what they perceived to be the concern of research, and so, largely, ignored the need to utilize research to further develop Gestalt therapy theory and support Gestalt therapy practice. That has begun to change.

Gestalt therapy focuses more on process (what is happening) than content (what is being discussed). The emphasis is on what is being done, thought and felt at the moment rather than on what was, might be, could be, or should be.

Gestalt therapy is a method of awareness, by which perceiving, feeling, and acting are understood to be separate from interpreting, explaining and judging using old attitudes. This distinction between direct experience and indirect or secondary interpretation is developed in the process of therapy. The client learns to become aware of what they are doing psychologically and how they can change it. By becoming aware of and transforming their process they develop self acceptance and the ability to experience more in the “ now” without so much interference from baggage of the past.

The objective of Gestalt therapy, in addition to helping the client overcome symptoms, is to enable him or her to become more fully and creatively alive and to be free from the blocks and unfinished issues that may diminish optimum satisfaction, fulfillment, and growth. Thus, it falls in the category of humanistic psychotherapies.

Gestalt therapy theory rests atop essentially four “load bearing walls:” phenomenological method, dialogical relationship, field-theoretical strategies, and experimental freedom – Brownell, P. (ed.) (2008), *Handbook for Theory, Research, and Practice in Gestalt Therapy*, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Although all these tenets are present in the early formulation and practice of Gestalt therapy, as described in Perls, F. (1969), *Ego, Hunger, and Aggression*. and in *Gestalt Therapy, Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951), the early development of Gestalt therapy theory emphasized personal experience and the experiential episodes understood as the “safe emergencies” of experiments; indeed, half of Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) consists of such stylized experiments. Later, through the influence of such people as Erving and Miriam Polster (Polster & Polster, 1973), a second theoretical emphasis emerged: contact between self and other, and ultimately the dialogical relationship between therapist and client. Later still, field theory emerged as an emphasis (Wheeler, 1991). At various times over the decades since Gestalt therapy first emerged one or more of these tenets, and the associated constructs that go with them, have captured the imagination of those who have continued developing the contemporary theory of Gestalt therapy. Since 1990 the literature focused on Gestalt therapy has flourished, including the development of several professional Gestalt journals. Along the way, Gestalt therapy theory has also been applied in Organizational Development and Coaching work. Thus, currently, Gestalt therapy training institutes often offer programs in both clinical and organization tracks.

The goal of a phenomenological exploration is awareness (Yontef, 1993).

This exploration works systematically to reduce the effects of bias through repeated observations and inquiry (Yontef, 2005).

The phenomenological method comprises three steps: (1) the rule of epoché, (2) the rule of description, and (3) the rule of horizontalization (Spinelli, 2005). In the rule of epoché one sets aside one's initial biases and prejudices in order to suspend expectations and assumptions. In the rule of description, one occupies oneself with describing instead of explaining. In the rule of horizontalization one treats each item of description as having equal value or significance. The rule of epoché sets aside any initial theories with regard to what is presented in the meeting between therapist and client. The second rule implies immediate and specific observations, abstaining from interpretations or explanations, especially those formed from the application of a clinical theory superimposed over the circumstances of experience. The third rule avoids any hierarchical assignment of importance such that the data of experience become prioritized and categorized as they are received. A Gestalt therapist utilizing the phenomenological method might find him or herself typically saying something like, " I notice a slight tension at the corners of your mouth when I say that, and I see you shifting on the couch and folding your arms across your chest ... and now I see you rolling your eyes back." All this is not to say that the therapist never makes clinically relevant evaluations, but that he or she, when applying the phenomenological method, temporarily suspends the need for that (Brownell, in press, 2009, 2008).

To create the conditions under which a dialogic moment might occur, the therapist attends to his or her own presence, creates the space for the client to enter in and become present as well (called inclusion), and commits him or herself to the dialogic process, surrendering to what takes place between them as opposed to attempting to control it. In presence, the therapist “shows up” as the whole and authentic person he or she is (Yontef, 1993) instead of assuming a role, false self, or persona. To practice inclusion is to accept however the client chooses to be present, and that may be in a defensive and obnoxious stance as well as an overly sweet but superficially cooperative one. To practice inclusion is to support the presentation of the client, including his or her resistance, not as a gimmick but in full realization that that is how the client is present. Finally, the Gestalt therapist is committed to the process, trusts in that process, and does not attempt to save him or herself from it (Brownell, in press, 2009, 2008)). It should be noted that since Gestalt therapy is an experiential therapy, it is extremely difficult to encapsulate it in the concepts used above, which Perls would probably have referred to as “elephant shit.” From the above description one would be hard put to envision what a Gestalt therapist really does or what a session would look like!

“The field” can be considered in two ways. There are ontological dimensions and there are phenomenological dimensions to one’s field. The ontological dimensions are all those physical and environmental contexts in which we live and move. They are the office in which one works, the house in which one lives, the city and country of which one is a citizen, and so forth. The ontological field is the objective reality that supports our physical existence.

The phenomenological dimensions are all mental and physical dynamics that contribute to a person's sense of self, one's subjective experience, but are not merely elements of the environmental context. This could be the memory of an uncle's inappropriate affection, one's color blindness, one's sense of the social matrix in operation at the office in which one works, and so forth. It is in the way that Gestalt therapists choose to work with field dynamics that makes what they do strategic (Brownell, in press, 2009, 2008). Gestalt therapy focuses on the character structure; according to Gestalt theory, the character structure is dynamic rather than fixed in nature. To look into one's character structure, the focus would be on the phenomenological dimensions rather than the ontological dimensions.

Gestalt therapy has distinguished itself by moving to action, away from mere talk therapy, and is considered an experiential approach (Crocker, 1999).

Through experiments, the therapist supports the client's direct experience of something new instead of the mere talking about the possibility of something new. Indeed, the entire therapeutic relationship could be considered experimental, because at one level it is the provision of corrective, relational experience for many clients, and it is the "safe emergency" that is free to turn this way and that. An experiment can also be conceived of as a teaching method that creates an experience in which a client might learn something as part of their growth (Melnick & Nevis, 2005).

Examples: (1) rather than talking about one's critical father, a Gestalt therapist might ask the patient/client to imagine the parent was present, or that the therapist was the parent, and talk to that parent in this fashion; (2) If a client/patient is struggling with how to be assertive, a Gestalt therapist

could either (a) have the patient say some assertive things to members of a therapy group, or (b) give a talk on how one should never be assertive; (3) A Gestalt therapist might notice something about the non-verbal behavior or tone of voice of the client; the therapist might have the client exaggerate the non-verbal behavior and pay attention to his/her experience while doing so; (4) a Gestalt therapist might work with the breathing or posture of the client, and changes in these when the client talks about different content. Through all these means the Gestalt therapist is working with process rather than content, the How rather than the What.

Notable issues

In field theory, self is a phenomenological concept, and is a comparison with 'other'. Without other there is no self, and how I experience other is inseparable from how I experience self. The continuity of selfhood (personality functioning) is something achieved rather than something inherent "inside" the person, and has its advantages and disadvantages. At one end of the spectrum, there is not enough self-continuity to be able to make meaningful relationships or to have a workable sense of who I am. In the middle, personality is a loose set of ways of being that work for me, commitments to relationships, work, culture and outlook, always open to change where I need to adapt to new circumstances, or just want to try something new. At the other end, it is a rigid defensive denial of the new and spontaneous. I act in stereotyped ways, and either induct other people to act in particular and fixed ways towards me; or I redefine their actions to fit with the fixed stereotypes.

In Gestalt therapy then, the approach is not the self of the client being helped or healed by the fixed self of the therapist, but the exploration of the co-creation of self and other in the here-and-now of the therapy. There is not the assumption that the client will act in all other circumstances as he or she does in the therapy situation. However, the areas that cause problems will be either the lack of self definition leading to chaotic or psychotic behaviour, or the rigid self definition in some area of functioning that denies spontaneity and makes dealing with particular situations impossible. Both of these show very clearly in the therapy, and can be worked with in the relationship with the therapist.

The experience of the therapist is also very much part of the therapy: since we are co-creating our self-other experiences, the way I experience being with the client is significant information about how the client experiences themselves. The proviso here is that I as therapist am not operating from my own fixed responses, and this is why Gestalt therapists are required to undertake significant therapy of their own during training.

From the perspective of this theory of self, neurosis can be seen as fixed predictability—a fixed Gestalt, and the process of therapy can be seen as facilitating the client to become unpredictable, really, more responsive to what is in the client's present environment, rather than responding in a stuck way to past introjects or other learning. If the therapist is working from some theory of how the client should end up, this defeats the aim of the therapy.

Change

In what has now become a “ classic” of Gestalt therapy literature, Arnold Beisser (1970) described Gestalt’s paradoxical theory of change. The paradox is that the more one attempts to be who one is not, the more one remains the same (Yontef, 2005). Conversely, when people identify with their current experience, the conditions of wholeness and growth support change. Put another way, change comes about as a result of “ full acceptance of what is, rather than a striving to be different” (Houston, 2003).

Historical development

Fritz Perls was a German Jewish psychoanalyst who fled with his wife Lore to South Africa to escape Nazi oppression. After the war the couple emigrated to New York City, which had become by the late 1940s and early 1950s, a center of intellectual, artistic, and political experimentation.

Early influences

Frederick Perls was educated as a medical doctor in Germany. He was trained in psychoanalysis and became a psychiatrist. He assisted Kurt Goldstein at Frankfurt University where he met his wife Lore Posner (Laura) who had a doctorate in Gestalt Psychology. They fled Nazi Germany in 1933 and settled in South Africa. During their years in South Africa they also became influenced by Jan Smuts and his “ holism”. In 1936 Fritz Perls attended a psychoanalyst’s conference in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia, where he presented a paper on oral resistances, mainly based on Laura Perls’ notes on breastfeeding their children. Perls and the paper were turned down.

[citation needed] (Perls did present his paper in 1936 but it met with ‘ deep disapproval’ (In and Out the Garbage Pail, Fritz Perls, 1969))

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The seminal book

The seminal work was Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality, published in 1951; co-authored by Fritz Perls, Paul Goodman, and Ralph Hefferline (a university psychology professor, and sometime patient of Fritz Perls). As it turns out, most of the original Part II of the book was written by Paul Goodman from the notes of Fritz Perls, and contains the meat of the theory. It was supposed t