

I do my thing, and you do your thing.  
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations  
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.  
You are you, and I am I,  
And if by chance, we find each other, it's beautiful.  
If not, it can't be helped.  
- Fritz Perls

Extended, the lines of relationship intersect in the eternal You.  
Every single You is a glimpse of that.  
Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You.  
The mediatorship of the You of all beings accounts for the fullness of our relationship to them  
- Martin Buber

Discuss Field theory with reference to sensitive practice as a respectful and empathic approach to entering a person's world and exploring their phenomenological and dialogic field. Use clinical experience and references to literature examined to support your expressed viewpoint. Please read all material on 'Field theory' in First, Second and Third year readers.

### **Introduction:**

As I start to press the keys on my keyboard to write this essay on Gestalt field theory, I am contemplating how my field is currently configured, what are the forces at work? As the proud father of a newborn child, I see a few new forces active in my field, namely, that I am a little more sleep deprived and have less time than usual to devote to the research required to create a "presentable" paper on field theory. Also, the deadline is looming just two weeks away. But another force is also active, negating, or at least neutralising some of these other impinging forces. I've decided to support myself in not aspiring to create a "brilliant essay" on field theory, and being ok with producing an "average essay". Indeed, as you, the reader, come into my field as a force of influence, I'm hoping that my attempt to illuminate the subject of field theory will be an enjoyable and thought provoking experience for you, so that, despite the new forces active in my field, you will indeed think this is a reasonable essay.

I will begin by looking at the significant influence physics has had on the use of the term field, the shift from the Newtonian mechanistic old world view, through Maxwell's/Einstein's relative field view to the Quantum Mechanics constructive relativistic new world view, how the theories became a view of reality and how physics continues to compliment and support Gestalt therapists working in a field theoretical way.

Next I will first give an overview of the history of the terms 'field' and 'field theory' from a psychology and Gestalt perspective. I will discuss the influence Kurt Lewin and Jan Smuts played in the development of a field theory and its adoption by Perls, Hefferline and Goodmans(PHG). I will also discuss the modern Gestalt view of field theory.

I will look at how Gestalt works in a field theoretical way using phenomenology, dialogue and experiment using a small sample case study based on Lewin's approach.

Finally I will discuss Malcolm Parlett's five principles of working with the field and finish with a summary that Gestalt's approach of working in a field sensitive way is both practical, useful to our clients and is increasingly being supported by research from diverse fields.

### **A Physics history - old world view to new world view**

Prior to approximately the 16<sup>th</sup> century, humans lived in relationship. We lived in small cohesive communities and we experienced nature in terms of organic relationships,

characterised by the interdependence of our spiritual and material needs. The needs of the individual were subordinate to the needs of the community. We belonged, and we knew it<sup>1</sup>.

But this view of the world changed rapidly during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, where the notion of an organic, living and spiritual world was replaced by a mechanistic, predictable world. This change of view of the world was born out of various philosophies, predominately the "scientific method" that was influenced by the early Greek philosophies and Aristotle's (384-322) assertion that "*an object moves because of its inherent properties*". Galileo (1564-1642), (studying the motion of the planets) asserted that "*an object's movement was the result of various influences*".

These modes of thought culminated in what became known as **Newton's classic mechanistic** view of the world. In this world view, mind and matter existed in two separate and different realms. In the material world, objects/entities were constructed of basic building blocks (the most fundamental being the atom) and could be studied objectively (using the scientific method) with their behaviour and movement predicted precisely. Each entity had a "**core essence**"; and although one entity could assert influence over another entity (for example a planet's gravity affecting another planet), they could essentially be studied individually, hence the term **objective reductionism**. This reductionism permeated all thinking at the time and led to Descartes' (incorrect) assertion of: "*I think, therefore I am*"<sup>2</sup>. With this assertion, the essence of being human was reduced to the thinking machine/the mind, with the body being reduced to the role of a mechanistic vehicle of transportation.

In physics, a new concept appeared, **the field**, first introduced by James Maxwell in his work with electromagnetism. This new field theory concept proved experimentally useful in predicting reality and measuring the direction of force as a vector of forces in a field. With the advent of Maxwell's four equations describing the structure of the electromagnetic field, there was born, in Einstein's words "**a new reality**". The field thus moved from an epistemological field theory to an ontological field reality.

*"The electromagnetic field is, for the modern physicist, as real as the chair on which he sits (Einstein and Infeld 1938, in O'Neill, 2007)*

In this new world view, phenomena no longer have an essence, but their essence is a representation of the influence of forces in the field in which they exist, i.e. their essence is relative to their context/field. But at this point, the observer is still essentially considered outside of the field, and scientific experimentation still continued with the study of the forces

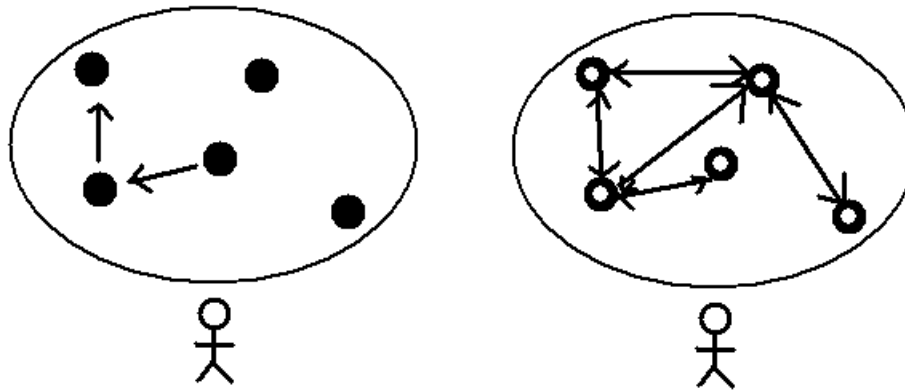
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<sup>1</sup> This way of living still exists in some of the old cultures that have maintained their way of existence, e.g. Australian aboriginals.

<sup>2</sup> It is debatable whether or not Descartes actually meant a duality split between mind and matter, but for the purposes of this essay, I'm following the well held view from the scientific method stance that indeed Descartes viewed the body as merely a carrier of the all important mind where a person's essence existed.

in the field objectively. It was not until the convergence of relativity theory (RT) and quantum mechanics (QM) that the modern world view was complete.

The old world view and new world view (prior to the convergence of RT and QM) at this point can be summed up with the following two diagrams:



Newton's objective/individualist world

Maxwell/Einstein relative/individualist field

Figure 1

Note: in Newton's world view, the arrows are one dimensional, denoting that one object may impact the other, but not necessarily vice-versa. In the second diagram, the influence works both ways reflecting the relatedness/interconnectedness of each phenomenon (hence why in the second diagram the objects are less solid, denoting field dependence for their essence).

This table summarises the essential characteristics of these two world views:

<b>Newtonian Objective/Individualist world</b>	<b>Maxwell's/Einstein's relative/individualist field</b>
Objects exist independently of each other	Phenomena exist relative to (in relation to) each other
Each object has a core essence, independent of other objects	A phenomena's essence is constructed by a field of influencing forces
Objects may or may not influence each other, but only mechanistically	Phenomena influence each other as forces in the field
<b>Observer exists outside of /independent of the objects he observes</b>	<b>Observer exists outside of/independent of the phenomena he observes</b>
<b>Observer has no influence on observed objects</b>	<b>Observer has no influence on observed phenomena</b>
There is no field in operation	There is a field in operation

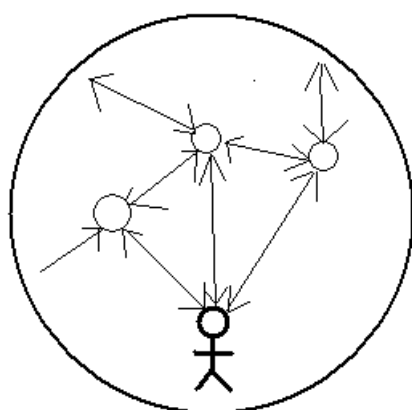
With this paradigm shift, or "**new reality**", we have shifted from an *individualistic objective* view of reality to a *relational/relative individualist* reality. This was the reality that partially supported PHG's notion of a field, i.e. that when you study a human you must do so in the context of the organism/environmental field in which they exist, but you, as the observer, remain outside of this field.

Another major shift occurred when relativity theory combined with quantum mechanics theory. Quantum mechanics theorists<sup>1</sup> were theorising about the infinitely small, fundamental particles of the universe. They observed that a particle could behave as either a wave or a particle (wave/particle duality). The form in which it manifested (as either wave or particle) was determined by whether or not it was being observed. Their theories lead to the conclusion that in the infinitely small world, the observer impacts upon/influences that which he observes, and that no experiment can successfully draw a conclusion without including the observer. In fact the observer is no longer considered outside that which he observes but participates in its construction, i.e. *the universe is fundamentally a participatory universe* (Wheeler in Capra, 1991, p141). Here, the **observer/participator is inextricably involved in the construction of reality**<sup>2</sup>. This new reality is nicely summed up as follows:

*A careful analysis of the process of observation in atomic physics has shown that the subatomic particles have no meaning as isolated entities, but can only be understood as interconnections between the preparation of experiment and the subsequent measurement. Quantum mechanics thus reveals a basic oneness of the universe* (Capra, 1991, p68):

A crucial feature of this world view is that the human observer is not only necessary to observe the properties of an object, but is necessary to even define these properties. The observer acts as another influencing force in the field. **Constructive relativity** is born (or constructive relationalism). In this world view, it is all about the **relationship** between both the phenomena in the field and the observer of those phenomena.

The following diagram illustrates this new world view:



<b>Quantum theory's relative/constructive field</b>
Phenomena exist relative to (in relation to) each other
A phenomena's essence is constructed by a field of influencing forces (of other phenomena)
Phenomena influence each other as forces in the field
Observer/Participator exists relative to the phenomena he observes
Observer/ Participator has a direct influence on observed phenomena (co-constructs reality)
There is a field in operation and the observer is part of this field
Each observer's view of reality is unique

Figure 2 – Quantum theory's relative/constructive field

<sup>1</sup> Einstein is often accredited with the finalisation of the new world view even though others (Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrodinger, et al.) had led the way with experimentation in quantum mechanics. Einstein's earlier work was focused on formulating cosmological theories of the large heavenly bodies of planets, stars, universes, black holes, etc., but it was only when he turned to the world of the very small that his revised theory of relativity, taking into account the position of the observer, made the paradigm shift complete.

<sup>2</sup> For consistency in this essay, I will continue to use the term 'observer', but in this world view, you can easily replace the word 'participator'.

It is this world view that underpins Gestalt's modern field theoretical view of inter-subjectivity and inter-relatedness and particularly informs the participation both client and therapist play in each others created view of reality.

### **A Psychological/Gestalt history – old world view to new world view**

William James (often considered the father of American psychology) was one of the first to consider the field as a concept in psychology. He used the term field as a way to describe the structure of consciousness instead of the reductionist units of thought, memory, neurosis, idea, etc. He states:

*"it (field of consciousness) is nevertheless there, and helps both to guide our behaviour and determine the next movement of our attention. It lies around us like a 'magnetic field', inside of which our centre of energy turns like a compass needle, as the present phase of consciousness alters into its successor" (James, 1902, in O'Neill).*

James was one of the first to speculate that Newtonian reality was insufficient in explaining our reality, particularly our psychological reality.

### **Gestalt psychologists**

The Gestalt psychologists (Goldstein, Wertheimer, Koffka, Kohler, et. al) were experimenting with perception and how Gestalten are formed. They undertook experiments (e.g. the vase/two faces figure/ground experiment) to prove that the processes involved in perception could not be reduced to their individual elements without losing the meaning of the overall whole. As Wertheimer states:

*"There are wholes, the behaviour of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole" (Wertheimer, 1925, in O'Neill, 2007).*

Two figures in particular, Jan Smuts and Kurt Lewin, had a significant influence on Perls' inclusion of the concept of a field into Gestalt in his book "*Ego, Hunger and aggression*", and the later book, co-written with Hefferline and Goodman, "*Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and growth in the Human personality*".

### **Kurt Lewin**

Lewin, working from a sociological view, did extensive work in examining and theorising on social systems. In his view, a **person's field (or life space)** consists purely of the psychological elements and only those elements from the non-psychological world that impinged or impacted upon the person. His was purely a **phenomenal field** (whereas Smut's field included trans-phenomena<sup>1</sup>). A person's life space (field) assumes different forms

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<sup>1</sup> Lewin used the terms 'phenomena' and 'trans-phenomena' to describe respectively, phenomena that existed in a person's life space and phenomena that existed outside of the person's life space. Trans-phenomena only become part of the person's life space when they transform into the phenomenal world of the person. (Refer to footnote 2).

and shapes and refers to different sections of the trans-phenomenal world depending on the person's **current** needs, goals, etc as well as what is happening at the boundary zone between the person's life space and the surroundings.

His field was also purely a **psychological field** since he drew the distinction between a person's life space and surroundings very strictly<sup>1</sup>. The life space includes the person's inner world of needs, memories, needs, drives, etc., and **only** non-psychological environmental phenomena that impacts upon the person's psychological world of needs, thoughts, ideas, drives, etc, i.e. it includes the curve itself (see Figure 3). All other trans-phenomena outside of the curve are excluded from the person's life space. Non-psychological facts become affective on human behaviour only if they are transformed into the psychological dimension. His field is illustrated by the following diagram:

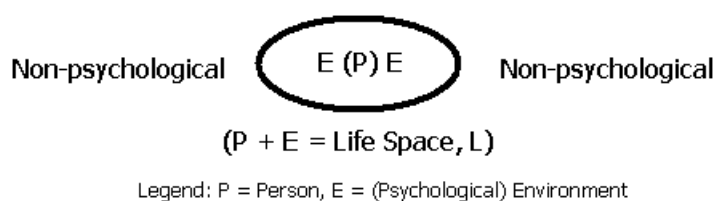


Figure 3 – Lewin's Jordon curve and life space<sup>2</sup>

In his view, it wouldn't make sense to say "It's in the field", without also stating whose field it is in. Another important quality of Lewin's field is how the forces in the field interact. The forces in his field have "strengths" or "valences", in their relation to other forces, i.e. they may strengthen or weaken other forces, or have a neutral or ambivalent effect on other forces. His field theory is more a methodology or epistemology for understanding a client's phenomenal world than an actual view of reality (ontology) but as I'll demonstrate later, it is a very useful way of working with a client. It is not a world view, or a unified field theory of everything.

### **Jan Smuts**

Smuts, with his primarily biologist's background, was heavily influenced by physicists theories on the nature of reality and Einstein's work in particular. An extract from his book "*Holism and Evolution*" elucidates his view of reality (field theory) as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Lewin gave this example from research. *'The food that lies behind the doors at the end of the maze so that neither smell nor sight can reach it is not part of the life space of the animal. If the individual knows that food lies there, this knowledge, of course, has to be represented in his life space, because this knowledge affects his behaviour. ...Indeed, the individual will start his journey if he thinks the food is there even if it is actually not there, and he will not move toward the food which actually is at the end of the maze if he does not know it is there.'* (Lewin, 1951, in Staemmler, 2005, p79)

<sup>2</sup> I adopted this diagram from Frank Staemmler's article in The British Gestalt Journal, Volume 15, No 2

*"Things, ideas, animals, plants, persons: all of these, like physical forces, have their fields, and but for their fields they would be unintelligible, their activities would be impossible, and their relations barren and sterile...one of the most salutary reforms of thought which could be effected would be for people to accustom themselves to the idea of fields, and to look upon every concrete thing or person or even abstract idea as merely a centre, surrounded by zones or auras or spheres of the same nature as the centre, only more attenuated and shading off into indefiniteness"(Smuts, 1926, in Staemmler, 2006)*

This quote implies a "field of fields" or an all encompassing field where each item in the field is impacted by other inter-related items in the field, i.e. a unitary field with all phenomena impacted by the surrounding forces of other phenomena. Smuts is attributed with coining the term **holism**, where people and animals cannot be studied outside of their environmental contexts. His field theory is more akin to a view of reality (ontology) which is a unified undifferentiated field of everything. Smuts' field differs from Lewin's field in that there is no distinction between the phenomena existing inside or outside the person's life space, i.e. it is not reduced to a particular shape or form or subset of all (trans)phenomena.

### **Perls, Hefferline and Goodman**

As I've mentioned earlier, PHG were influenced by many theorists and their field probably more closely resembles Smut's field more than any others. However there are some issues with their theory which I'll discuss here. Note their use of the term organism/environment, which is biologically orientated and borrowed from Smuts. Unfortunately they use the term "field" inconsistently.

*"Our approach in this book is unitary in the sense that we try in a detailed way to consider every problem as occurring in a social-animal-physical field" (PHG,1951, p228)*

They go on to describe a typical field as follows:

*"There is no single function of any animal that completes itself without object and environment. ..., it is always to such an interacting field that we are referring, and not to an isolated animal " (PHG,1951,p228)*

From this quote, it appears that all interaction between the person and their environment takes place in a unitary field yet in the following quote, there appears to be two fields:

*"even the hallucinations in delirium tremens are psychological realities, though the victim is incapable of distinguishing between internal and environmental fields" (PHG,1951, p247, in Staemmler 2006)*

They also use the term in combinations, "organismic field", "environmental field", "internal field", "imagined field", "acoustic field", "social field", "unconscious field", "field of consciousness", etc. Another "field of fields" or unitary field similar to Smuts.

When they use the term **internal field** this is closer to Lewin's notion of a psychological field, but when they refer to the **organismic/environmental field** it more closely

resembles the field of Smuts. This is confusing since as I've already stated, one is an epistemological field theory (Lewin's) the other an ontological field (Smuts').

Also the distinction between an **organismic field** and an **environmental field** implies a more individualist world view as opposed to an inter-subjective relational world view. This is no more obvious than in Perls's prayer "**I am I and you are you...**" (very individualist indeed). Yet Perls also stated the following:

*"The We doesn't exist, but consists of I and You, is an ever-changing boundary where two people meet. And when we meet there, then I change and you change, through the process of encountering each other..." (Perls, 1969, p7)*

This is much more relational and inter-subjective in approach. As a practicing Gestalt therapist, it is valuable to be aware of this distinction of the use of the term field and how it is used and in particular the inconsistencies in Perls and PHGs writings.

### **Modern Gestalt theorists**

Field theory stood still for many years, as has the constructive relativist theories in physics. However, more recently, writers such Crocker, Latner, Parlett, Wheeler, Yontef and others have all written extensively on field theory. I will now elucidate modern thinking on field theory from a Gestalt perspective.

Wheeler(1991) has suggested that Gestalt theory needs to be re-constructed from the ground up using relational constructivism as the core building block. From this frame of reference, I am in an ongoing process of being constantly co-created between my phenomenological view point and another's phenomenological viewpoint, i.e. I exist inter-subjectively. I no longer live in isolation as an individual, outside of others' worlds, but can, and do, only exist **in relation to** another. The **self**, is the system of processes that organises the field continuously into figure/ground formations depending on the emerging needs of the self in relation to the field (my sense of self arising in the sub-process of identification). To make sense of "my" world, I have to include your influence and vice-versa, since you stand as a co-constructing participator of my phenomena, and I stand as a co-constructing participator of your phenomena. We participate in an experiential co-constructed field and meet at the contact boundary, which Buber referred to as the "between". This view can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

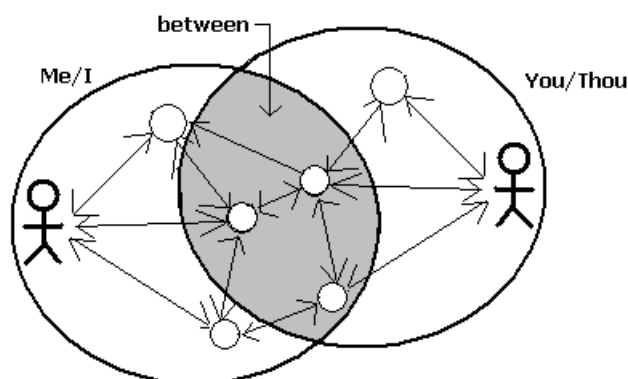


Figure 4 – Constructive relativism (or co-constructed reality)

We are locked in an ongoing dance of creation/destruction of each others phenomenological fields of reality. If another person joined the picture, he/she would join in the ongoing process of co-creation. We are now all inter-connected and we live in relation to each other. The "other" may be an inanimate object, another species, or a human being. This new field theory is nicely summed up by Yontef as follows:

*"In field theory all events and things are constructed according to the conditions of the field and the interests of the perceiver. Everything real is constructed this way, no matter how materially concrete or abstract" (Yontef, 1993, p288)*

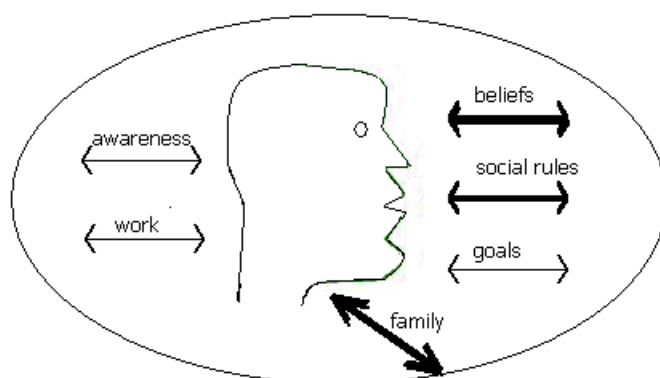
### **Awareness, phenomenology and dialogue**

In the above diagram, you could easily replace one of the observers, for example 'you' with an animal or inanimate object such as a tree. In the on-going process of co-creation, the **between** would remain relatively stable since one side of the co-creating dynamic has less flux in the co-creating process, as opposed to two humans in contact with each other. This is where Gestalt psychotherapy uses dialogue, phenomenology and awareness as tools to illuminate the between and facilitate change in humans. This is particularly true in the setting of a therapy session between client and therapist. By bringing in my capacity to be present, inclusive, confirming and aware (Buber, 1970) and engaging in an ongoing dialogue with the client, I am available as a powerful force in their field for supporting a change in how they construct their field. If I work in a field sensitive, empathic and respectful way, I can bring awareness to **patterns of structure and force (or field configurations)** in how the client creates his/her phenomenological field of experience. These patterns of structure (and force) will represent both healthy fluid construction/destruction of the client's (figure/ground) experience (including the influencing field force of the therapist), and more rigid or stuck patterns of structure despite the added new force in the field, i.e. **fixed gestalts and unfinished business**. The easiest place to do this is to concentrate on the area of the field between us (the contact boundary), since it is available to both of us to observe phenomenologically.

For example, during a clinic session, as the therapist, I respectfully disclosed the following to a client who was talking about how her father repeatedly "missed" her as a teenager. "I feel sad when I think about your father missing you". Tears welled up in her eyes and I disclosed further "I notice you have tears in your eyes". We progressed to explore these tears. The interventions I offered were born out of the "between" we both co-created during the dialogic encounter. In the first field co-creation, my phenomenological field (my feeling of sadness) was co-created by her dialog about her father missing her (she is acting as a force in my field). When I emphatically revealed how my phenomenal field was being organised (I was feeling sad), that knowledge of my sadness re-organised her field to produce tears (I acted as force in her field). Her re-organising the field (producing tears) again acted as a force in my field (I noticed her tears). I again revealed my field by disclosing I had noticed her tears. Her field reorganised around my disclosure and we continued in the co-creating process. In each moment, we both reorganised the field into appropriate figure/ground formation from the active forces in the field.

### **Awareness – a powerful force in the field**

Using Lewin's metaphor of a life space (field), here's an example of how I might work with a hypothetical client. My client (called Raj) is an Indian migrant living in Australia. He is unmarried, lives with his elderly parents, has another brother living in Sydney who is married, and he is well educated. He has come to me looking for help with his depression and general lack of interest in life. I engage in dialogue with Raj and start to see the forces active in his field. I note that because of his strong religious beliefs and cultural background, he seems to have a fixed belief that he must look after his aging parents. "It is my duty"(introject), is what he repeatedly says. He also seems dissatisfied at work and refuses to think or fantasise about more interesting or rewarding work(retroreflection), and is envious of his younger brother, who, according to Raj "does whatever he wants to do"(projection). The forces in his field could be represented as follows:

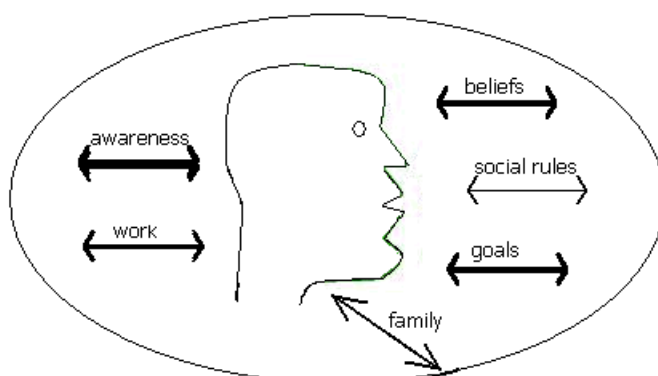


Note: the thickness of the arrow represents its strength of force in the person's life space

Figure 5 – Sample life space at a moment in time pre-therapy

Note that in the diagram above, beliefs, social rules and family feature as powerful forces in his field, while his own goals, work and awareness are weaker forces.

Through an ongoing dialogue over an extended period of time, empathising with his position from my own as an Irish immigrant living in Australia, I support Raj to explore his own field forces (increasing his awareness). Through trying various simple experiments (e.g. fantasising about interesting work), I support him to access his own goals and respectfully challenge him to rethink his cultural duties of the oldest son, since he is no longer living in India. In modern Australia, the responsibility for looking after elderly parents is more likely to be shared among siblings and there is more support available from the government. Eventually Raj, by moving through several impasses<sup>1</sup> (where the forces in the field collide and eventually shift), confronts his brother and asks him for more support in looking after their parents. His brother is only happy to oblige, as he often felt Raj came between him and his parents who he wanted to be closer to as they got older. With this added support, and his increased awareness of his various introjects, retroreflections, projections, etc., Raj then went on to leave work to pursue a job which was more interesting to him. His life space could be redrawn to show the changes that occurred in the field:



Note: the thickness of the arrow represents its strength of force in the person's life space

Figure 6 – Sample life space at a moment in time post-therapy

Note how the forces of awareness and goals have increased which in turn reduces the force of social rules and beliefs. Also the burden of the family has also been reduced and work has become a source of positive energy in Raj's life.

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<sup>1</sup> Passing through an impasse could be viewed as a process of bifurcation. The term bifurcation comes from Chaos theory. In chaos/complexity theory, chaotic systems have shown to still have order/structure (for example a tornado). The system tends to move and organise around a particular 'attractor' of which there are currently four types defined (Fixed Point, Limit Cycle, Torus and Strange). To shift the system into a different state, it needs to be brought to the 'edge of chaos'. Bifurcation occurs when we push a system beyond the threshold of stability. In chaos theory, this is often done by bringing another more stable but dynamic system alongside the system requiring change. For example, a therapist, entering the co-creating process with the client serves both as the agent providing energy to into the client's chaotic system, but also providing stability so the shift from one state to another is tolerable to the client. This implies an enormous responsibility for therapists to have 'done their own work' so they can provide both that stability and force to support clients, and in my opinion, is why Gestalt therapists are well placed to do such deep work with clients since their experiential training, at least in part, supports this work to be done before taking on clients.

Note that this example is only a snapshot of two life spaces at a moment in time and does not represent a fixed unchanging life space. Also, the interventions I offered were born out of the between, which we both co-created. As Mackewn(1997) states:

*"In Gestalt there are no prescriptions of exactly when or how to do things because the intervention is always field dependent" (Mackewn, 1997, p89).*

### **Parletts 5 principles**

Malcolm Parlett deserves a mention on any essay on field theory as he has written extensively on the subject. While grappling with the complexity of field theory he states:

*"there is a potential difficulty in that the field can become so inclusive as to include anything and everything" (Parlett, 2005, p44).*

However he managed to summarise field theory under 5 principles as follows:

#### 1. Principle of organisation

As mentioned earlier, the field has patterns of structure and force. Meaning can only be derived from looking at the total situation, the totality of co-existing facts. For example, a client says to the therapist *"My father died yesterday"*. The therapist could intervene by saying *"I'm sorry to hear that"*, but instead explores the field a little further by asking *"How does that affect you?"*. The client responds by saying *"I'm glad because the abuse is now over"*. By being field sensitive, the therapist allows meaning to emerge from more of the facts available in the field.

#### 2. The principle of Contemporaneity

This principle points to the fact that we can only look at the phenomena available in the present and that both past and future (as either memories, reflections, plans, fantasises, etc. ) are represented in these phenomena. As Lewin stated *"the character of the situation at a given time may include the past-as-remembered-now or the future-as-anticipated-now, which will form part of the person's experiential field in the present"*. Gestalt's focus on working with here-and-now phenomena adheres to this principle.

#### 3. The principle of singularity

This principle articulates the point I demonstrated earlier (see figures 2 & 3), that each person's view of reality is unique to them. This is easily demonstrated in groups, where each person in the group will have a different perspective on the current context. Therefore to jump to generalisations or categorisations about a person's condition would be to deny the

individual their uniqueness. If asked "*How do you treat anorexics?*", the Gestalt therapist will resist making generalisations and will look at the specifics of the individual, such as how they support themselves, how they make contact, how much awareness they have, etc. By keeping in mind that each person's view of reality is unique we can prevent reductionism and generalisations.

#### 4. The principle of changing process

The field undergoes continuous change. We cannot assume that something that was true about the field in the past is true now. Field theory is thus relativistic. If the field is in flux, our perceptions of reality are continuously being recreated. Some patterns of structure or forces may persist from one moment to the next, but a person's reality is always in a state of becoming, of being remade anew, i.e. "*we never step into the same river twice*". Gestalt's adherence to "what's happening now?" honours this principle.

#### 5. The principle of possible relevance

This principle asserts that no part of the field can be excluded in advance as being irrelevant. Although some phenomena may appear to exert no force in the field, that is only true for a moment in time. Something that was irrelevant half an hour ago may now be relevant, and vice versa. Gestalt therapists work with what is obvious, in bringing meaning to what has become invisible or automatic, is being taken for granted or regarded as of no relevance. This doesn't mean that everything and anything in the field needs to be exhaustively included. Since the field is organised, we can focus on the obvious forces in the field, knowing also that nothing is excluded.

### **Summary/Conclusion**

The paradigm shift in world views from the classic Newtonian mechanistic world view to the Quantum mechanics relativistic/co-constructed view is inextricably linked with an equivalent paradigm shift in psychology/psychotherapy from an objective/individualist view to a relational/co-constructed world view. However, the world is still playing catch up.

Gestalt psychotherapy, with its emphasis on **field theory** as a core principle underpinning our work through the use of dialogue, phenomenology and experiment, is well placed to act as a force in the field to shift the still predominant view of individualism towards the view of inter-subjectivity/inter-relatedness.

Gestalt's world view is increasingly being supported by research in diverse fields such as neuroscience, social studies, physics and the increasingly converging fields of spirituality and mind sciences. By working in a respectful, empathetic way, we can utilise our field sensitivity to enhance our clients healing process. By supporting our clients to increase their awareness,

we are supporting them re-organise their patterns of structure in their field, i.e. assisting them to re-organise their field into more healthy and fluid formations. By consciously attending to our inter-relatedness to all things we can come to live our fullest bloom. It is only through this inter-subjectivity that our own uniqueness is recognised. As Buber eloquently described this:

*"Every actual relationship in the world rests upon individuation: that is its delight, for only thus is mutual recognition of those who are different granted – and that is its boundary, for thus is perfect recognition and being recognised denied" (Buber, 1970, p148)*

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