

Gestalt Review¹²

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Editorial

On Developmental Perspectives

SUSAN L. FISCHER, PH.D.

It was with great sorrow and profound loss that the world mourned the passing of Daniel N. Stern, M.D. (1934-12 November 2012). One obituary in the *New York Times* (14 November 2012) remarked on his having "revolutionized developmental psychology, integrating psychoanalytic theory, with methodically sophisticated empirical study, and a brilliant and creative mind." Another emphasized "his creative genius, his willingness to re-think established theory, his ability to integrate multiple perspectives on the human mind [that] will continue to influence our thinking and be used to train future generations." In particular, Stern "changed the way that we think about babies, mothers, the development of mental life, and the process of psychotherapy," challenging the Freudian idea that babies go through defined critical phases like oral and anal.

This issue of *Gestalt Review* is, in many ways, a testimony to Stern's legacy with its cluster on the pursuit of a Gestalt developmental perspective.



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Matthew Kamholtz

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Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb's article, "Towards a Developmental Perspective in Gestalt Therapy Theory and Practice: The Polyphonic Development of Domains," which is dedicated to Stern, is an attempt to answer the question: "What developmental theory is coherent for a Gestalt therapist?" The search is for a theory that will allow the freshness of here-and-now contact with the client to remain figural and, at the same time, support intentionality for contact that has been previously blocked, lost its spontaneity, or become dormant. "Domain," Spagnuolo Lobb asserts, "is an area of processes and competencies by which the functions related to various developmental areas mutually integrate." Most significant here, perhaps, is that like Stern in his developmental work, Spagnuolo Lobb (following Howard Gardner) maintains the idea of complexity, taking into consideration the field to encourage the development of more effective competencies, and eschews the more rigid notion of stages.

In her Commentary, "Associations while Reading 'Towards a Developmental Theory of Gestalt Therapy,'" Susan Roos praises Spagnuolo Lobb's attempt to surmount the "roadblock" to the construction of a Gestalt-related developmental theory – based on the idea that a focus on development is in conflict with the here-and-now – by using expressions such as "the past in the present" and "the depth in the surface." For Roos, the heart of the article is that "the challenge for this approach, even today, is that of using theoretical references that start from the *experience* of the client *and* of the therapist in the here-and-now of the therapeutic situation" (emphasis in original). Roos's unrest is "piqued," however, by what she sees as an all-too-quick jump in the way that an assumption in a case example becomes "fact." And her frustration with language in its attempt both to communicate and to obfuscate is revealed by her asking, with semi tongue-in-cheek, "What the hell would a psychoanalyst do with a concept called polyphonic development of domains"? Roos concludes, nonetheless, that Spagnuolo Lobb proposes a concept that "may become a link in the construction of a developmental model with a Gestalt perspective."

Violet Oaklander finds "quite interesting" Spagnuolo Lobb's "developmental theory," based as it is "partially on contemporary models of infant development." Oaklander is therefore inspired in her Commentary, "A Developmental Theory of the Infant," to enrich Spagnuolo Lobb's paper by synthesizing her own work. Stating that a child comes into the world with capacity to make full use of all aspects of her organism (senses, body, emotions, intellect), she goes on to describe a variety of developmental stages and factors in the child's life that cause children to restrict, block, inhibit themselves (confluence, egocentricity, introjects, getting needs met, organismic self-regulation); and to talk about the "social aspects" that affect

the child's growth (setting limits, cultural expectations, systems). In her Response, however, Spagnuolo Lobb clarifies that her paper does not relate to a developmental theory nor to a method of working with children, but "to a theory of approaching the process of development that can become a valid map for the Gestalt therapist working with clients of any age to understand the present as a figure emerging from a complex ground." She is left wondering if Oaklander "agrees with the consideration of complexity of competencies for contact."

In his Commentary, "Finding the Line: Resolving Dialectical Tensions in Developmental and Gestalt Therapy Theory," Peter Mortola asks – "What of Gestalt therapy theory is coherent with developmental theory?" – thereby distinguishing his own motivating question from that of Spagnuolo Lobb (cited above), because he considers himself a "Developmentalist" first and a "Gestaltist" second. He addresses three of the domains she describes and highlights them as dialectical tensions that must be resolved in an ongoing process of healthy development. In her Response to Mortola's attempt to tie these dialectical domains from Gestalt theory into the larger theme from developmental theory, Spagnuolo Lobb reframes her initial question to make explicit its underlying meaning: "If I believe in these principles and want to remain a Gestalt therapist – if I wear the 'glasses' of Gestalt therapy – how am I supposed to see development?" At the same time, she affirms the importance of the alternative question proposed by Mortola.

It is no coincidence that Elpida Kalaitzi's article, "Calling for a Gestalt Developmental Perspective," follows the dialectic provoked by the foregoing cluster of papers, commentaries, and response. Taking as her basis Gordon Wheeler's model toward a theory of development which demonstrates that "the philosophy of Gestalt can support an understanding of child development based on the evolution of contact experience within the broad, relational field of the environment," she goes on to show that self psychology and intersubjective theory, particularly as presented by Lynne Jacobs and Rich Hycner, provide a rich source for understanding developmental processes within a relational framework. Her conclusion – that Gestalt therapy can effectively embrace a developmental perspective that avoids the pitfalls of traditional developmental models – aligns her with Stern and Spagnuolo Lobb, both of whom she cites.

Stuart N. Simon's paper, "Applying the Cape Cod Model® to Coaching," looks at development in a more practical way in relation to organizations. In particular, he draws on two aspects of the model – *Well-Developed Competencies*® (habits, repeated patterns of behavior that may occur without awareness), and *Less-Developed Competencies*®. He avows that "CCM® practitioners who use an optimistic approach to support growth and

development – personal, systemic, organizational – work from the perspective of adding new competencies as opposed to “correcting” dysfunction.”

The Reflections section contains developmental perspectives in the sense of gradual unfolding or working out of details with respect to recent writings in *Gestalt Review*. Lynne Jacobs, in taking issue with Des Kennedy’s review of Frank-M. Staemmler’s book, *Aggression, Time, and Understanding: Contributions to the Evolution of Gestalt Therapy* (*Gestalt Review*, 16.1, 2012), avers that Kennedy “has separated embodiment from thought in a way that neither Merleau-Ponty nor Staemmler do.” Susan Roos, in “The Kubler-Ross Model: An Esteemed Relic,” questions continued reliance on the received epigenetic stages that appeared in Kubler-Ross’s book, *On Death and Dying* (1969), which is the subject of Carmen Vázquez Bandín’s article on grief (*Gestalt Review*, 16.2, 2012). Roos espouses instead new *developments* in the field of thanatology: emerging models of grief, based on recent empirical research, which are “less intrapsychic, more nonlinear, and more interpersonal – traits that are in accord with Gestalt therapy theory.”

Finally Charles Bowman, in his review of *Fritz Perls in Berlin 1893-1933: Expressionism, Psychoanalysis, Judaism*, suggests that Bernd Bocian presents the *developmental* years of our founder as “history from a field perspective,” as “fluid knowledge” that allows us “to grow, not only from attention to process and analysis of the current situation, but also through detailed examination of those persons and events comprising our historical ground.” And Michael Craig Clemmens, in his evaluation of *Gestalt Therapy for Addictive and Self-Medicating Behaviors*, maintains that Philip Brownell’s book is an important step in the *development* of a literature on “the sorely neglected practice of Gestalt therapy and addiction,” even though he disagrees with some of its premises.

I invite you, our readers, to dip into and savor the expansive feast of developmental perspectives that is this issue of *Gestalt Review*.

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