3 Gestalt therapy, Dialogical Self Theory, and the “empty chair”

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If for classical psychoanalysis the couch was the outstanding symbol, the “empty chair” was the prominent icon for classical Gestalt therapy, by which it became both famous and infamous in the 1960s and early 1970s. Frederick S. Perls had borrowed the various techniques that he implemented by the use of a chair from Jacob Moreno (1964; see also Zerka Moreno, 1965). Perls, however, did not base his application of these techniques on Moreno’s theory; he worked with them without linking them to any particular theoretical background.

Subsequent generations of gestalt therapists imitated Perls’ technical approach; to a large degree, they did not even acknowledge their psychodramatical origin. So the way in which Gestalt therapy became established, was, on the one hand, very much equated with empty chair work, and, on the other hand, the frequent use of furniture for technical purposes took place without much theoretical grounding. I find both aspects regrettable.

The disregard of Moreno’s socially oriented concepts meshed well with the individualistic bias, into which Perls (1969) relapsed in the last years of his life: “I do my thing, you do your thing ... And if by chance we find each other, it’s beautiful. If not, it can’t be helped” (p. 4). With this bias, however, Perls deviated pretty much from the notions he had previously developed in collaboration with Paul Goodman, a social critic and anarchist philosopher. In the book Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality (Perls, Hefferline,1 & Goodman 1951) the two of them had put forward ideas that defy any individualistic interpretation; one of the most basic and salient ones reads like this: “It is the contact that is the simplest and first reality” (p. 227).

Another quote, which – even more clearly than the one above – illustrates the influence George Herbert Mead had on Paul Goodman and also demonstrates one of the similarities that can be found in the tradition of Gestalt therapy as well as in the one of Dialogical Self Theory (subsequently abbreviated as DST – see Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992): “Social relations ... are original in any human field, long prior to one’s recognizing oneself as an idiosyncratic person ... Personality is a structure created out of such early interpersonal relationships” (Perls et al., 1951, p. 320).

This statement can easily be traced back to one of Mead’s most perceptive observations:
The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process.

(Mead, 1934/1963, p. 135)

It is obvious that when Perls and Goodman worked together, they drew on Mead’s insights when they formulated their basic theory, as did Hubert Hermans (who also referred to compatible writings, for instance by William James (1890) and Michail Bakhtin (1984, 1986), among others, when he asserted that “the self can only be truly dialogical when the other person is seen as not purely outside, but simultaneously part of the self and even constitutive of it” (Hermans, 2011, p. 654).

Although my heart beats for Gestalt therapy, I have to admit that Hermans’ theorizing has functioned as a bridge for me that linked fundamental propositions such as the one by Mead with my understanding of the efficacy of the therapeutic techniques that Perls used in an individualistic fashion. Only after I thoroughly delved into DST, the connections between the anthropological, social-psychological, and practical therapeutic realms became clear to me (see Staemmler, 2015) and made it possible for me to work with “empty chairs” in a non-individualistic, relational manner. In what follows I will try and explain my current point of view.

**Participatory appropriation: contact first**

To better understand the relevant connections it may be helpful to characterize in more detail the developmental psychological processes that Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1981) called “interiorization.” This term does not describe a linear activity, by which something that has first taken place outside of the person is then transformed into something psychic without modification — “one-to-one,” so to speak. Rather, we are dealing with a process of creative, “participatory appropriation … [that] is a process of becoming, rather than acquisition” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142, original italics), as a result of which the properties the child develops find their personal form:

An individual participating in … communication is already involved in a process beyond the individual level. Benefiting from shared thinking thus does not involve taking something from an external model. Instead, in the process of participation in social activity, the individual already functions with the shared understanding. The individual’s later use of this shared understanding is not the same as what was constructed jointly; it is an appropriation of the shared activity … that reflects the individual’s understanding of … the activity.

(Rogoff, 1990, p. 195, original italics)
things in the environment, engaging in systematic bouts of joint attention with others” (Rochat, 2010, p. 177). Interactions are also the critical dimension, when it comes to the question, what is essentially appropriated: With respect to the view of developmental psychology I propose here, it is decisive that the process of appropriation does not primarily refer to the behavior of individual others, to their personal features, or to the contents of the messages they communicate. Processes of internalization like these do, of course, also exist (later in development). But on the fundamental level we have to acknowledge that first of all “it is the interactive experience that is internalized, not ‘objects’” (Stern, 2010, p. 144, italics added); it is the appropriation of a “dual being” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 345): the duality of self and other. What gets owned is what first has been shared, not what belongs to the individual other only. Therefore Barbara Rogoff speaks of “the process of appropriation from shared activity, in contrast to the process of internalization of external activity” (1990, p. 195). And she concludes: “Hence, participation is itself the process of appropriation” (1995, p. 151).

This observation is crucial since it underlines that contact – or, as we may prefer to say today, relationality – is the primary reality, to which the highest priority must be attributed. Consequently, both “external” and “internal positions,” as they are referred to in DST, are secondary phenomena that are preceded (both temporally and systematically) by shared activities. So relatedness is the conditio sine qua non of individuality. Hence from the very beginning and for the rest of the lifespan, all sorts of individual psychological processes carry a dialogical quality; the self is, once and for all, provided with a dialogical “format”: To develop a self is to make the relatedness with others and the interaction with them one’s own project and, thereby, to constitute oneself. “Mental activity which is initially distributed or shared between individuals is later actively reconstructed on the internal plane” (Fernyhough, 2008, p. 228).

A self, then, is the sum of its appropriated shared activities that manifest as external and internal positions – plus its ongoing participation in interactions with others by which internal positions and outside positions relate to each other; hence the self is relational and permanently engaged in dialogues with others (external and outside) and with itself (internal positions). This is why in Gestalt therapy we “call the ‘self’ the system of contacts at any moment” (Perls et al., 1951, p. 235).

In other words, “to be means to communicate” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 287, original italics), and that is not only the case with outside or external positions, the latter of which Stern (1985, pp. 111ff.) calls “evoked” others, but also with one’s internal positions. A human being is not only a self in relation to other persons – a notion that Brent Slife (2004) has named “weak relationality” – but also a “relational being” (see Gergen, 2009) in the sense of what Slife calls “strong relationality.” Relatedness is not only influencing the self, once it is constituted, it is constitutive of the self in the first place. Therefore Heidegger (1962) can maintain: “Dasein’s Being-in-the-world is essentially constituted by Being-with ... Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factically no Other is present-at-hand or perceived” (p. 156).
The Gestalt therapist supports the client to explore and clarify these psychological processes by assuming what Hermans calls an (outside) “promoter position” for the client. If the client wants to work on his relationship to another person, the therapist introduces the “fantasy conversation technique” (including an I-position and an external position). In a similar vein, for therapeutic ends the “technique of soliloquy” may be used to help a client externalize and enact a self-talk that is taking place between two (or more) of her or his internal positions (each of them assigned to a respective chair), by having her or him clearly identify (and maybe name) her or his relevant positions, externalize and locate them in different places (e.g. chairs) in the room, and then enact them and have them respond to each other in turn.

Multiple relatedness and the plurality of the self

The subsequent train of thought builds on what I have said above and begins with a statement that is both very significant and may seem trivial at first sight: As a rule of thumb, from birth on human beings do not interact with one other person only, but with several. Usually, this starts with the fact that infants do not only engage in contacts with their mothers but also with their fathers and other caregivers as well as with siblings, grandparents, further relatives, etc. Moreover, the number of attachment figures increases as children get older: “We do not live in a world of one other human being, but in the world of human beings . . . Part of the human condition is the plural” (Schmid, 2002, p. 86, original italics).

As Daniel Stern (1985, p. 97) has demonstrated with his concept of “Representations of Interactions that have been Generalized (RIGs),” already in the first months of life it is relevant (and hence not trivial at all) for the development of the dialogical self that “each of the many different self-regulating other relationships with the same person will have its own distinctive RIG. And when different RIGs are activated, the infant re-experiences different forms or ways of being with a self-regulating other” (p. 110f.).

One may also state: Since any respective RIG has originated from an interaction with a certain other person, it always includes an implicit reference to the interaction with exactly this person. The particular interactive experience manifests itself in a self-experience, one might – admittedly a little laboriously – denote as the “self-that-I-am-in-dialogue-with-this-person.” Thus the self, as it actualizes itself in a given situation, is connected in this way with the experience of what it is like to interact with this person. Any RIG, therefore, includes a memory of another person, who is then called the “evoked companion” by Stern. And there are many.

This brings about a number of consequences, among them the fact that any experience of the self is connected with a more or less implicit memory of one (or several) other person(s). In principle, a self without reference to (one or several) other(s) is impossible, even though this reference can, of course, be more or less conscious; in addition, it may be superimposed, transformed, or
obscured by subsequent psychic processes. As a result, the clarification of blurry references can count as a common element in all forms of psychotherapy.

The fact that interactions with different others contribute to varying kinds of self-experiences is only one constellation that results in the plurality of the self. In addition, significantly diverse interactive experiences with the same partner in unlike situations, during which the partner actualizes a certain one of his many possible I-positions, lead to a particular RIG and, hence, to a special experience of the “self-that-I-am-in-contact-with-this-person-in-this-situation.” In sum, various forms of self-experience will emerge; the self becomes plural: “How you are when you affect me is already affected by me, and not by me as I usually am, but by me as I occur with you” (Gendlin, 1997, p. 30); in DST terms we are dealing with a certain I-position that forms in a particular joint situation.

As quoted before, Gestalt therapy theory defined the self according to the above-mentioned principle as “the system of contacts at any moment” (Perls et al., 1951, p. 235). And Perls and his coworkers immediately added: “As such, the self is flexibly various” (ibid.). Within their interactions with various others as well as within different interactions with the same others, human beings form diverse ways of self-experience. So it can be seen as a matter of course that strong relationality inescapably must lead to the plurality of the self: Relational beings necessarily are plural beings.

To put it simply: I am a different self, when I am participating in a dialogue with Peter or Paula, and I am a different self, depending on whether I am engaged in a loving or in a controversial dialogue with Paula. In the words of George Herbert Mead (1934/1963):

> We carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people … There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience.
>
> (p. 142)

This means that a “multiple personality, as an abnormal phenomenon, seems to be the pathological side of a healthy functioning dialogical self” (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004, p. 3; see also Rowan & Cooper, 1999).

However, between the many positions or “voices” that take part in the dialogue of a plural self, there are not only relationships of mutual supplementation, support, and harmony. Contradictions, inconsistencies, and incongruences abound and are – to individually differing degrees – quite tolerable to the extent to which the various selves or part-selves (“internal positions” in DST) engage in a dialogical exchange with each other in spite of their differences, instead of trying to dominate, marginalize, or ignore each other. Human beings desire to be understood, not only by others, but also by themselves (see Staemmler, 2012a).

Metaphorically speaking, one can conceive of the dialogical self as a “society of mind” (see Hermans, 2002, 2005) with diverse and various positions, coalitions, and contradictions that have to find a way of living together without falling into fragments on the one extreme or being subjected to confluence or totalitarian
egalitarianism on the other extreme. This task can be mastered if all positions are provided with equal rights of existence and dialogical participation, so that they can engage in a psychic discourse, which is following the ethics of inclusion. What Perls et al. (1951) say about the contact between different people is equally true for the contact between different I-positions:

One person and another are confluent when there is no appreciation of a boundary between them, when there is no discrimination of the points of difference or otherness that distinguish them . . . When persons are in contact, not in confluence, they not only respect their own and the other’s opinions, tastes, and responsibilities, but actively welcome the animation and excitement that come with the airing of disagreements. Confluence makes for routine and stagnation, contact for excitement and growth.

(pp. 118ff., original italics)

Accepting and cherishing alterity, otherness, and differences is an essential prerequisite for this attitude (see Buber, 1957, 1965; Cooper & Hermans, 2007; Lévinas, 1969, 1999). Therefore, “in therapeutic applications of dialogical psychology, different, often conflicting, voices are encouraged to be spoken/listened to and brought into open dialogue with each other” (Adams, 2010, p. 343). The aim of this process is not primarily the establishment of unity, consensus, or harmony among the various positions; first of all the aim is the dialogue itself, since for the word (and, consequently, for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a lack of response . . . Being heard as such is already a dialogic relation. The word wants to be heard, understood, responded to, and again to respond to the response, and so forth ad infinitum.

(Bakhtin, 1986, p. 127, original italics)

In order to be heard and to be responded to, the various voices of the psyche often need support. It is part of the therapist’s task to provide the client with this help. The discourse ethics, as they have been outlined by Habermas (1993) with respect to societal communication, can also serve for the therapist’s orientation in dealing with her or his clients’ various I-positions, since it has developed criteria that – with certain qualifications – can also be applied to the psychic processes of the individual. – I have added some bracketed extensions to the subsequent quote:

Anyone [any I-position] . . . may take part in discourse . . . Anyone [any I-position] may render any assertion [by any other I-position] problematic . . . Anyone [any I-position] may introduce any assertion into the discourse . . . Anyone [any I-position] may express his/her opinions, wishes and needs . . . No speaker [no I-position] may be prevented by constraint within or outside the discourse from making use of his/her rights established in [the previous sentences].

(Alexy, 1990, pp. 166f.)
What is good in society, is good in the society of mind as well. What on an interpersonal level shows up as *ethics*, can be seen as standards for psychological *health* on the individual level. Just as political groups in a society do not need to agree or even like each other, different positions in the society of mind do not have to live in perfect harmony; discrepancies and frictions can have their places.

“An ‘inner society of voices’ … does not, in essence, differ from the communications in the outside world” (Hermans, 2003, 94). In order to live together well, divergent positions need to accept each others’ existence and respective rights and, moreover, must be ready to engage in a continuous dialogue. So in my view, it is part of the task of psychotherapists to promote their clients’ recovery and/or growth by supporting the standards of discourse ethics in the way in which the clients converse with themselves: “‘Good’ psychological plurality seems to be about a dialogical relationship and openness between the different positions that someone has” (Cooper, in Cooper, Mearns, Stiles, Warner, & Elliott, 2004; p. 178; see also Cooper, 2003).

**Self as process**

If we conceive of the self as dialogical and plural, the consequence has to be: The self cannot be a thing such as a computer or a cardiac pacemaker, some “ghost in the machine” (Ryle, 1949, pp. 15f.), or some kind of homunculus, which would exist somewhere in the so-called “inside” of a person (in a “Cartesian theater”) and would pull the strings from there. “A person is a fluid process, not a fixed and static entity; a flowing river of change, not a block of solid material; a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits” (Rogers, 1961, p. 122). Even if people – including psychologists – frequently tend to imagine processes as things, it would be erroneous to reify the self: “There are no homunculi,” Carl Rogers (1959, p. 196) stated, and neuroscientific research concedes this point to him: “One should, indeed, be skeptical of a homunculus-like knower, endowed with full knowledge and located in a single and circumscribed part of the brain. It makes no sense physiologically. All the available evidence suggests that nothing like it exists” (Damasio, 1999, p. 190). Just as the procedural character of the self prohibits any reification, its plurality renders it difficult to speak of a homogeneous or even “true” self. The plurality of the self makes it most unlikely that – maybe except for paranoid, fanatic, or otherwise very unusual psychological conditions – only one single *I*-position captures the entire foreground of a person’s awareness for a longer period of time, whereas all others remain in the background. As I have quoted Perls et al. (1951, p. 235) before, from a Gestalt therapy vantage point the self is a dynamic and fluctuating pattern of its contacts at any given moment; although (actual, remembered, or fantasized) interpersonal contacts play a predominant role in self-formation, other contacts such as the one with gravity, oxygen, food, etc. are also relevant.8

Although the self is fluid, it also has continuity. It configures itself at any point in time from the *I*-positions that it actualizes, but this does not mean that it has to be
fragmented, as some critics of a procedural and plural self-concept fearfully assume. This fear is based on a limited understanding of the self’s plurality, which means that there are almost always several contacts activated in a given situation along with their respective I-positions. Whereas some contacts vanish and are replaced with new ones as the situation changes, there are also still some other contacts that are maintained from one situation to the next. Accordingly, some I-positions recede into the background of awareness, whereas others may stay in the foreground, in case they are also useful in response to the new situation. Thereby the situational selves are connected to each other over time, even if they differ from each other to a more or less large degree (see Staemmler, 2015, pp. 25ff.).

Moreover, I-positions must not be reified, too; they are neither global agencies (as, for instance, in Freud’s structural model) nor “sub-personalities” with necessarily lasting essence. They can change with time, disappear entirely, or emerge newly under the conditions of novel situations and contacts. “It is commonly said that each of our relationships ‘brings out’ different traits in us, as if all possible traits were already in us, waiting only to be ‘brought out’. But actually you affect me” (Gendlin, 1997, p. 30), and under this impression I sometimes create a new position, a personal response that I newly invent and with which I surprise myself, as it were.

By implication, the various positions that constitute a respective self at a given situation can relate to each other in different ways. They can exist side by side without referring to each other, they can complement and support each other, they can question, challenge, or sabotage each other. Their coherence is not a must; it is also variable. The degree, however, to which a certain person can tolerate inconsistencies among I-positions and situational selves, can be more or less high depending on the personal tolerance for ambiguity and situational conditions (see Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949; Whelton & Greenberg, 2004).

Last but not least, I would like to point out another implication that results from what I have said before: Gestalt therapy’s egalitarian understanding of the positions that form a society of mind implies that in principle there is no prefigured hierarchy that would attribute a general dominance or an “overarching view” (Hermans, 2003, p. 123) to any one of them over all others; according to my therapeutic experience, any position has the potential to become a meta-position that “creates a certain distance toward the other positions” (ibid.) for a certain amount of time, and any meta-position can turn into an ordinary I-position again.

A clinical vignette

My client, who was a therapist herself and who I will call “Eileen,” was difficult for me to work with for a long time, although I liked her and felt strong compassion [the therapist as an external promoter position] both for the chronic disease from which she suffered and for her shame about the disease [a self-critical position of the client], because of which she excluded herself from many social activities. At the time of the session described in what follows, the therapy centered on the way she tried to cope with these conditions.
What I found demanding was a behavior she displayed again and again in our sessions: Although, on the one hand, Eileen hauntingly conveyed to me how desperate she felt and how urgently she needed help, on the other hand, she would not acknowledge any responsibility for her withdrawn way of living and shameful experience [two versions of her dependent, helpless I-position]; she constantly blamed her terrible fate, objected to any suggestions I made and criticized any feedback I gave her as unfounded or off target [her self-critical position directed at the outside world]. My attempts at understanding our interaction as a form of projective identification (see Staemmler, 1993) were met by her with a lack of comprehension. She also rejected my proposals to engage in some chair work to explore her self-depreciative soliloquy and/or to establish a self-compassionate, internal promoter position (see Staemmler, 2012b).

I felt thwarted, and even though I told her about my frustrating experience in a friendly manner, I was left without resonance [my I-position as a failure was activated]. In my experience, our conversation remained awkward and without any flow. After having consulted my supervisor [an external promoter position], I decided to discuss this general pattern with her at the beginning of our next session [i.e. I mobilized my internal promoter position].

To my great surprise, Eileen immediately appeared interested in my reflections and engaged in a very constructive and clarifying conversation with me [her cooperative I-position]; she also seriously considered my remarks without showing any signs of mortification or shame. Moreover, she confirmed my impression of the infertile pattern in our previous sessions [a self-reflexive meta-position]. She said she had experienced our conversations as some kind of “fight.” While she had been aware of opposing my efforts, she also had had a sense of doing the wrong things all the time and even of being basically wrong [from the meta-position she referred to her self-critical I-position].

It occurred to her that this resembled a feeling she used to experience again and again as a child and an adolescent towards her mother for whom she never seemed to do things in the right way [a critical external position]. She had repeatedly promised to her to improve in order to maintain the connection with her, but had never had an idea what exactly she should do to satisfy her mother’s expectations [her dependent, helpless I-position]. As a result she had formed the persevering self-image of being fundamentally “difficult” and “wrong” [her self-critical I-position].

I suggested that this self-image was not a fact, but an introject she had generated as a result of the interactions with her mother; so the originally outside mother-position had turned into an external I-position that frequently “talked” to her with a shaming and denigrating voice. Given the impression that I did not have to be very careful with my words, I called my client’s introject “crap” [I took a friendly-critical promoter position in support of her self-reflexive meta-position]. With my choice of drastic words, I intended to shatter her belief in the veridical character of, and her submissive stance towards, her self-critical position. When she heard me say this, her face brightened up very obviously.

I also told her that I saw both some parallels and some differences between her situation with her mother and her situation with me: In contrast to how she
remembered her mother [a critical external position], I had not left her uninformed about what she could do, but had made precise suggestions how to proceed [acting as an external promoter position towards her] that she, however, had not picked up. She agreed and described how she nevertheless had felt left alone. My suggestions had taken her into a feeling of solitude; she had experienced me at a distance – giving her advice without being personally palpable for her, as if I had told her: “Since it is your problem, you need to do your work by yourself, and I will just watch you working without getting involved as a person myself” [from the perspective of her dependent, helpless I-position she had experienced me as a cold and distant external position].

So it turned out that my proposals of two-chair work had enhanced this experience, since to her they had suggested a scene in which she was confronted with herself [her self-critical I-position as well as her dependent, helpless I-position], thereby losing sight of me, her therapist [as an external promoter position], and feeling left alone [helpless] with her internal struggle. In other words, given the resonance with the external position of the mother, from her perspective my choice of technique resembled a critical position and as such failed as a promoter position.

In contrast, during the phases of our “fights,” she had felt a connection between us; it had been a fight between herself and another person. As unpleasant as they were, these fights provided her with the feeling of being in touch with me [her I-position “I as being connected”]: Whenever I responded to her avoidances, she had the impression that I was directly responding to her [her therapist in the position of relating to her]. So from her perspective, we stayed in close exchange with each other, since our respective contributions succeeded each other closely, and their contents were tightly related to each other.

I asked her how our current conversation felt for her: Did she feel connected or left alone? Her response was unequivocal: connected [her I-position “I as being connected”]. She said that for her this was so, since I talked with her directly, showed my commitment [her therapist in the position of relating to her and supporting] so that she had a sense of the two of us being active together [her position, “I as being connected” expanding into “I as being part of a We”].

The next day Eileen sent me a letter:

I have been surprised about how I felt after our session. This feeling of happiness that emerges from a sense of easiness and connection was unknown to me before. I guess I have never felt happy like this before. It is not a “loud” feeling; I do not need to express it emphatically. It is mine, but I want to share it. Telling you about it, helps me experiencing it again.

For me as a therapist this episode was most salutary. It taught me in an impressive way that the therapeutic work on the relationship between my clients’ different I-positions needs to be supplemented with the parallel work on the relationship between my clients and myself. As the notion of strong relationality
highlights, human relatedness means, first of all, relatedness between people, which leads in a second developmental step to the dialogical relatedness of a person to herself. In adult life the one can never be separated from the other.

Concluding note

Carl Rogers (1961) once remarked: “It seems to me that at bottom each person is asking, Who am I, really? How can I get in touch with this real self, underlying all my surface behavior? How can I become myself?” (p. 108, original italics). He was certainly right in that many people are engaged in this sort of soliloquy, asking themselves these questions and trying hard to find their answers. Probably Rogers was one of them, too. And whenever such questions are put and the respective answers sought, they are informed by the prevailing culture and zeitgeist.

Against the backdrop of my conception of strong relationality and the dialogicality of the self, my questions and answers are different from Rogers’ and his time. The presumption that there would be something like a “real self,” that one could find and from then on would not have to search for anymore, because once and for all one would have become oneself, does not have much validity for me anymore. In a similar vein, the notions of depth psychology that conceived of a “true” self that was to be found somewhere “under” the surface by excavating it in an archaeological manner, appear obsolete to me today.

It is my impression that contemporary people living under the current post-modern conditions need support not to hope for any certainty from some more or less definite truths about the world and about themselves, but to look for ways to get along with the flow of the external world as well as with the fluidity of their own selves. This is a demanding task that can only be mastered with a fair amount of tolerance for uncertainties and inconsistencies as well as with an open-mindedness for the idea of inclusion – both with respect to other human beings as to one’s own society of mind.

It is my hope that I have been able to explain, how the non-individualistic tenets of Gestalt therapy can be infused with the differentiated concepts of DST in order to clarify the links between the anthropological, psychological, and practically clinical realms including the techniques that use chairs, which only together can form a holistic approach to psychotherapy.

Notes

1 Ralph Hefferline only played a marginal role in terms of theory development.
2 A linear process in this sense is sometimes denoted with the term “introjection.”
3 The similar term used in traditional Gestalt therapy theory to describe this phenomenon is “creative adjustment” (Perls et al., 1951).
4 This is obviously not a simple process of accommodation in the sense of Piaget.
5 Below I will return to Stern’s (1985, pp. 110ff.) related concepts, the “RIGs” and the “evoked companion.”
6 The meaning of these terms is explicated in Chapter 1 of this volume by Gonçalves, Konopka, and Hermans, as well as by Raggatt (2012).
7 The notion of an “integration” of diverging positions into a “leading culture” is not compatible with this norm, neither on a societal level nor on an individual level.
8 Rosa (2016, pp. 331ff.) has subdivided human relations with the world into three categories or “axis”: the “horizontal” (relations with other human beings), the “diagonal” (relations to material things), and the “vertical” (religious or similar relations to nature in general, to God, to the universe etc.) In this chapter I focus on the first axis.
9 At this point in time, I remembered Perls et al.’s (1951) observation that “to eliminate introjects . . . the problem is not . . . to accept and integrate dissociated parts of yourself. Rather, it is to become aware of what is not truly yours, to acquire a selective and critical attitude toward what is offered you” (pp. 190f).

References


Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind* (pp. 139–164). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.


