

A WORKING SYNTHESIS OF TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS AND GESTALT THERAPY

ABSTRACT: By supplying the necessary theoretical link between the predominantly Gestalt concepts of retroflection and projection, a basic core is provided for the fundamental synthesis of Gestalt Therapy and Transactional Analysis. This synthesis suggests that the ego states of Parent and Child correspond in most cases to particular forms of retroflection and projection. The present activities of retroflection and projection take as their vehicles of expression the Parent and Child, which are by and large the products of past experience. Transactional Analysis and Gestalt therapy are thus two complementary approaches to the same psychodynamic factors, and hence a synthesis of their best elements should prove stronger than either alone.

TWO SCHOOLS of humanistic psychology today enjoying wide popularity are Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Therapy, the former associated with Eric Berne (1961, 1964, 1972) and Thomas Harris (1969), the latter with Fritz and Laura Perls (Perls, 1969a, 1969b; Perls et al., 1951; see also Fagan, 1970; Polster, 1974; Pursglove, 1968). Much of the success of Transactional Analysis seems to lie in its utter

simplicity and the basic directness of its approach, while the success of Gestalt Therapy stems from the powerful and fundamental changes of growth it facilitates in those who endure it with awareness.*

Because of the simplicity of Transactional Analysis and the power of Gestalt Therapy, many people—therapists, educators, laypeople—have been using the two procedures together, either alternating between the two or using a more or less adequate synthesis of both. There is certainly good reason to attempt such a synthesis, and—barring a few theoretical differences—I believe a working synthesis of Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Therapy is indeed possible, a synthesis which combines the speed and simplicity of T. A. with the power and depth of Gestalt.

We can begin our synthesis on a solid foundation if we realize that Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Therapy generally agree that the personality is a tripartite structure. Early on, Freud himself had proposed a three-way structural division of the psyche: the superego (with subdivisions of ego-ideal and conscience); the ego proper; and the id, closely associated with the infantile ego (Blum, 1953; Fenichel, 1972). Despite the fact that the theoretical underpinnings of the two newer schools of psychotherapy differ somewhat from the Freudian, they both agree that the individual's personality structure contains three more or less distinct subpersonalities. Transactional Analysis refers to them as the Parent, the Adult, and the Child; while to Gestalt Therapy they are the Topdog, the centered self, and the Underdog.

Such appears to be the tripartite division of the personality. There is the superego, the Parent, the Topdog, whose nucleus is composed of the internalized demands and judgments of parents and other authority figures. There is the infantile ego, the Child, the Underdog, consisting of all the feelings of helplessness and dependence that the person felt as a child. Finally, and fortunately, there is the mature ego, the Adult, the authentic self, capable of seeing present reality and capable of basing its decisions on objective facts and not on the threats of the Parent/Topdog nor the archaic fears of the Child/Underdog.

But to bring out this Adult and firmly establish it, the person has to free himself of the continuing choice to operate in his modes of Parent or Child—and just this is the aim of therapy. In Transactional Analysis this “freeing-up of the Adult” is based on a simple principle—since the tapes of the Parent and Child are recorded permanently in your brain,

*My own formal position is that of spectrum psychology (Wilber, 1975). The approach suggested here is directed toward the Shadow/Ego Level.

you cannot erase them. But if you can learn to spot and clearly recognize in yourself the Parent tapes as well as the Child tapes, you can choose to turn them off! In short, you can learn to “stay in the Adult.”

Thus, as a person begins Transactional Analysis, she learns the fundamentals of the Parent-Adult-Child scheme, and then she applies them to her present transactions. She begins to spot the signals that indicate her “Parent is hooked,” such as the furrowed brow, pursed lips, the pointing index finger, usually accompanied by such verbal pronouncements as “Now you’re in real trouble”; “Never let me see you doing that again!”; “How dare you!”; “I can’t for the life of me . . .” The individual also begins to recognize the clues that her “Child is hooked,” such as tears, pouting, whining voice, temper tantrums, and feelings of anxiety, fearfulness, inferiority, and so on. As the individual starts to get a real feel for her Parent and Child, she will further discover that both the Parent and the Child can be “aimed” in one of two basic directions. The Parent, for example, can direct its demands and pronouncements *outwardly* toward others, but it can also direct its threats and punishments *inwardly* toward the Child in the person. Likewise, the Child can be aimed *inwardly* toward the threats of its own Parent or *outwardly* toward the threats of the Parents in others. And all in all, this gives individuals *four basic patterns* in which they can operate if they refuse to stay in the Adult. (I mention this seemingly trivial point because it will actually turn out to be of great significance in our synthesis of Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Therapy.)

The fact that individuals can step back and reflect on which tapes are now playing and which direction they are aimed—just that is the therapeutic agent. For in objectively and rationally identifying the Parent and the Child in both self and others, they are necessarily operating in the Adult! And therapy is simply a day-to-day strengthening of the Adult and a silencing of the archaic Child and Parent.

Now the aim of Gestalt Therapy is similar, in that it, too, tries to free up the personality from the overbearing influence of the Topdog/Parent and the Underdog/Child. But since, according to Gestalt Therapy, these “two clowns” have their genesis in impasse situations where self-potential is abandoned in favor of environmental support, Gestalt Therapy aims directly at recovering that lost potential. Now the major mechanisms that a person uses to throttle, avoid, and surrender his own potentials are those of introjection, retroflection, and projection—mechanisms we will soon explain in detail. It is precisely by working through these “mechanisms of avoidance” that Gestalt Therapy restores

to the individual his potentials for growth, thus freeing his energies from the clutches of the Topdog and Underdog.

It is expressly the strengths of these two therapeutic systems that we wish to combine and utilize. We have already examined briefly the structure of the psyche according to both schools, and concluded that both would generally agree the personality to be a tripartite system—composed of Parent/Topdog, Adult/Authentic self, and Child/Underdog—whose basis was laid in times past but whose functioning is reactivated and purposefully maintained in the present. Hence, it is not so much with past “causes” but with present transactions that therapy must chiefly concern itself. Having briefly reviewed the structure of the personality, we will now focus our attention on its dynamics, for it is in this arena that neurotic battles are fought, and hence it is just here that we must seek our synthesis if it is to be of any real value in the therapeutic process.

Let us begin by looking more closely at the Child/Underdog. According to Transactional Analysis, the predominant feelings residing in everybody’s Child are ones of frustration, anxiety, and fear. And just because the tapes recorded in the Child are *permanent*, they can replay at almost any time in a person’s current transactions, given the right stimulus. A person might, for example, be in the midst of an economic crisis, or someone might make a snide remark to him, or he might not get his way in a given situation, or any number of such instances. “These ‘hook the Child’, as we say, and cause a replay of the original feelings of frustration, rejection, or abandonment, and we relive a latter-day version of the small child’s primary depression. Therefore, when a person is in the grip of feelings, we say his Child has taken over” (Harris, 1969, pp. 48–49).

But recall that according to Gestalt Therapy, the Child/Underdog is simply a position we take today in times of stress or impasse, where environmental support is not forthcoming and authentic self-support is not yet realized. Because this self-support is not yet achieved, the person feels totally resourceless, lacking potential, helpless—in short, she feels NOT OK. And in an attempt to assuage her NOT OK feelings, she throws herself into a manipulative frenzy, seeking to mobilize in others that which she fails to find in herself. Hence, instead of realizing her own resources, she looks to the environment for them. Yet it’s important to realize that *when the Child is hooked, a person’s potentials do not just up and leave her, they do not evaporate, they are not and could not be lost*—they are only abandoned, surrendered, projected. In other words,

according to Gestalt, the person's potentials are definitely available, but only in the form of projections!

Thus we come to our first preliminary synthesizing rule: *When the Child is hooked, we look for projections.*

Projection is the basic mechanism associated with the Child. No matter that the fundamental data of the Child was recorded when the person was three years old—the point is that *if* the Child is hooked now, the individual feels himself to lack the potential and the resources necessary to the task. But that potential is not thereby abolished or obliterated—it is merely projected and exists fully and completely in the projections. As Perls (1969b) explains, “Much material that is our own, that is part of ourselves, has been dissociated, alienated, disowned, thrown out. The rest of our potential is not available to us. But I believe most of it *is* available, but as projections.” Thus the potential is indeed present, but as projections, and we rediscover our “lost” resources—and hence facilitate staying in the Adult—by reowning our projections. The person whose Child is hooked does feel helpless, not because he lacks the necessary resources, but because he projects them, attributes them to everybody else. Thus, when the Child is hooked, we look for just those projections. In this area of therapy, the strength of Transactional Analysis is the ease with which it spots the Child; the strength of Gestalt is the ease with which it spots the projections. The wise therapist will use both, for the hooking of the Child and the projecting of potentials are flip sides of the same coin.

One of the aims of Transactional Analysis is to learn to recognize every signal and recording from the NOT OK Child so as to be able to turn off those tapes. If, for example, I am very upset and hurt “because of” some seemingly cruel remark made to me, I can learn to pause and realize, “Oh, those feelings of hurt and shame are simply my NOT OK Child.” That realization alone often brings immediate relief. Recognizing my uncomfortable feelings to be the replay of some NOT OK Child tapes, I am not caught up in them, I am not overwhelmed by them. In other words, I am learning to simply shut them off.

But—as many Transactional Analysts agree—sometimes the tapes just don't want to shut off. And under those circumstances it's almost impossible to stay in the Adult. The reason the person refuses to stay in the Adult is that he doesn't see how he is going to muster the potential, the resources, the strength to do so. In a sense, he *actively clings* to the position of the NOT OK Child because that is the only way he knows to cope.

This is the point where the very strength of Gestalt Therapy shows itself, and thus we may look to Gestalt for some complementary insights. The Child tapes won't turn off because they are associated with a projection, a bit of "unfinished business" that will clamor for attention until the gestalt is closed and the business finished. Conversely, in assimilating that projection one yanks the support out from under the position of the Child. Furthermore, to integrate projections it is not necessary to ask *why* one projects, but rather to discover *how* one projects. If you regain the simple awareness of how you now project, then you are spontaneously free to cease. In Transactional Analysis terms, if you discover not *why* you activated the Child tapes, but *how* you turned them on, *then* you are in a position to turn them off. It's almost as if you had, in the dark, inadvertently turned on a radio switch while you were trying to sleep, and the machine is now blaring away at full blast. To pause, reflect, and search out possible reasons for why you turned it on does you no good whatsoever—you could sit there and theorize forever . . . with the radio accompanying you. On the other hand, if you can find out *how* you turned it on—where the switch is and how it operates—then you can easily turn it off.

We will return shortly to the *how* of projections—what I would like to emphasize at this point is that I believe the reowning of projections is in fact precisely what occurs in Transactional Analysis as the person learns to spot the Child and then stay in the Adult. For what does the person who habitually comes on as the NOT OK Child actually feel as she learns to stay in the Adult? She feels a gradual discovery of her strength, her potential, and her resources—resources she didn't think she possessed when operating as the Child. By continually learning to stay in the Adult, she is simply learning to discover and act on her own potentials, and not surrender them by falling back into the archaic circuits of the NOT OK, resourceless, helpless Child.

But this is precisely the point where the complementary insights of Gestalt Therapy are so useful, for Gestalt accurately spots just which potentials the person is surrendering when she comes on as Child! For these potentials are present as projections, and thus the projections of the Child mark out exactly what potentials need to be returned to the person as she learns to stay in the Adult. In short, the activation of the Adult *is* the reowning of projected potential. Transactional Analysis proceeds through the former, Gestalt through the latter—but they certainly can be used conjointly. By learning to spot the Child, *and then the projections*, the person's ability to switch to the position of Adult is

greatly facilitated, for she understands exactly what potentials she will be mobilizing as the Adult. She knows what to look for. She begins to see just *how* she activates the Child. And thus she starts to understand the corollary to the first basic synthesizing rule: to stay in the Adult is to refuse to project.

So let us now proceed—as promised—to explore more systematically this mechanism of projection. Projections, to repeat, are facets of the personality not recognized as one's own but instead alienated and thus perceived as if they resided in other people. For example, a person who tends to approach people sexually can, for various reasons, try to avoid this impulse. But since the impulse is nevertheless definitely present, he cannot actually abolish it, he can only attempt to disown it. Doing so, he feels that *he* lacks that nasty impulse, but since he knows only too well that *somebody* has a hell-of-a-lot of sex on the mind, he has only to pick a candidate. And anybody will do, as long as he finds at least one. Suddenly, come to think of it, the world looks full of perverts, most of whom are out to rape him personally! And he feels NOT OK.

Projections are easily spotted, for they are aspects of people or things that strongly *affect* where they would otherwise *inform*. Thus, what I see in other people is more or less correct if it only informs me, but it is likely a projection if it strongly affects me—and that is the crucial difference. So if we are overly attached to somebody (or something) on the one hand, or if we avoid or hate someone on the other, then we are respectively shadow-hugging or shadow-boxing.

Since projections are actually disidentifications or alienations of some facets of self, in therapy we must do just the opposite—we take back, identify with, *reown* our projections. “So what we are trying to do in therapy is step-by-step to *reown* the disowned parts of the personality until the person becomes strong enough to facilitate his own growth. Everything the person disowns can be recovered, and the means of this recovery is understanding, playing, becoming these disowned parts” (Perls, 1969b, pp. 37–38). As I said, these disowned parts are very obvious—they are things, people, or events in the environment that affect and disturb us, and hence ones we energetically resist and avoid. So initially there seems to be a bonafide conflict between the person and his environment, a real individual vs. environmental feud. But by identifying with the disturbing elements of the environment, playing in fantasy as if he actually were those elements, the person soon realizes that the conflict is really between facets of himself. The battle is not between me and thee, but me and me—thee just got in the way.

We can say, then, that during Gestalt Therapy, all conflicts between self and environment are reduced to a prior conflict between self and self. Now in a broad sense (and I will clarify this in a minute), these conflicts between self and self are nothing but *retroreflections*. Thus, the initial movements of Gestalt Therapy are concerned with *converting or reducing all projections to retroreflections*. And it is to the undoing of retroreflections that Gestalt Therapy then directs its attention.

Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman explain retroreflections as follows:

To retroreflect means literally “to turn sharply back against.” When a person retroreflects behavior, he does to himself what originally he did or tried to do to other persons or objects. He stops directing various energies outward in attempts to manipulate and bring about changes in the environment that will satisfy his needs; instead, he redirects activity inward and *substitutes himself in place of the environment* as the target of behavior. To the extent that he does this, he splits his personality into “doer” and “done to.” (Perls et al., 1951)

Most retroreflections are done consciously; the person is perfectly aware that he is actively holding in an impulse—such as the urge to scream—perhaps until a more favorable time or place. The person, under these circumstances, knows both that *he* is doing the inhibiting and *how* he is doing the inhibiting. But in many cases the inhibitions have become habitual and thus are performed almost totally unconsciously. The person forgets how he inhibited or retroflected the impulse, and hence he can’t release it. The impulse is no longer temporarily suppressed, but chronically repressed.

Nevertheless, the impulse does not thereby vanish—it must have some sort of outlet, and denied direct expression in the environment, it takes as its object the next best thing, namely, the person himself. A person who chronically retroreflects anger turns that anger back on himself and then clobbers himself with his own energies. Someone who retroreflects her critical attitude finds that she is perpetually criticizing herself, punishing herself, beating herself. A student trying to work a math problem and not succeeding, slaps himself and pounds his thigh as he retroreflects his mobilized aggression.

It is in just this fashion that the personality is split into a “doer” and a “done to,” with the “done to” receiving the blows originally meant for the environment. It’s very much as if I started out to pinch someone

but instead turned that activity back and pinched myself. This is retroflection, and it necessarily splits the personality into two sides: the pincher versus the pinched. Thus we see there are always two poles in a retroflection: the pincher side of the retroflection is experienced as the *active* doer, powerful, inhibiting, forceful; while the pinched side of the retroflection is experienced as a more *passive* done to, helpless, inhibited, powerless.

Now in most retroflections, the person is at least vaguely aware with which of the two sides he is associated. The frustrated golfer who begins screaming at himself, “You stupid SOB, why can’t you learn to putt!” experiences himself as the active doer. On the other hand, the person who develops severe headaches when she knows she’d rather scream will feel herself as a rather passive done-to, a “victim” of her headaches and not the active cause of them.

At this point the reader might feel that these two sides of the personality are beginning to look very familiar. They are, in fact, merely different aspects of the same old “two clowns” we have already discussed. The pincher, the active doer side of the retroflection, is very intimately associated with the Topdog/Parent; and the pinched, the passive done-to side, is closely connected with the Underdog/Child. (Note, in this connection, Perl’s statement, “So the topdog and underdog strive for control. Like every parent and child, they strive with each other for control. The person is fragmented into controller and controlled.”) This intimate connection is borne out by several other factors.

Recall that in retroflection, an impulse is interrupted and diverted from its original object back onto the self. But why, let us ask, is the impulse diverted in the first place? There are, of course, numerous auxiliary “causes” retroflection, but the very root of the difficulty lies in the introjected Parent (Perls, 1951, pp. 146, 203; Perls, 1969a, p. 223). It is the Parent/Topdog with its “wall of conscience,” its shoulds and should-nots, that actively retroflects any of the impulses deemed unworthy. It’s almost as if the Parent were a mirror off which the impulse is reflected back onto the person himself. But the side of the person toward which the impulse is directed will necessarily feel that it *lacks* that impulse, that it is its victim, a helpless and innocent bystander. And this is, of course, the Child/Underdog. Overall, it looks very much as if the original impulse is retroflected off the Parent onto the Child.

Thus, we have our second preliminary synthesizing rule: *When the Parent is hooked, we look for retroflections.*

Retroflections come in all flavors. A few of the more common are

narcissism (retroflected affection), depression (anger), hypochondria (inspection), self-pity (pity), masochism (cruelty), compulsiveness (drive). As we mentioned, once a retroflection has occurred, and the personality is split into the active pincher and the passive pinched, the individual can—and usually does—associate himself more closely with one of the two sides. Sometimes, for the same retroflected impulse, the emotional tone of one pole is dramatically different from that of the other. For example, if a person retroflects his hostility and associates with the doer side, he feels active self-hate; but if he associates with the done-to side, he feels passive depression. So the retroflections I've just listed will, of course, change their tone a bit depending upon which pole the person associates with. In general, the more the impulse is inhibited, the more completely the person will associate with the passive, done-to side of the retroflection; that is, the more he will feel a NOT OK Child being beaten by his Parent.

Regardless of which pole a person associates herself with, to undo retroflections she has generally to begin by contacting and taking back the active pole. She has to assume responsibility for the impulses contained in the active pole by getting the feel of precisely *how* she turns that impulse back on herself. For once she feels exactly how she retroflects, then—for the first time—she is in a position to reverse the retroflection and redirect her energies back into the environment.

Again, I believe that just this reversal of retroflections actually occurs in Transactional Analysis as a person learns to shift from the mode of the Parent to that of the Adult. When the individual can say with certainty and feeling, “My Parent is hooked and is riding my Child,” then he can view his predicament objectively and rationally—he has engaged his Adult. By that very action he quits beating and criticizing himself and, significantly, he thereby frees that energy for a critical appraisal of the environment and his transactions with it.

However, as with the Child, there are stubborn cases in which the Parent just won't shut off. And it is expressly here that Gestalt can add its complementary insights, offering the Transactional Analyst an alternative to the Freudian “why?” The individual can't shut off the Parent because he hasn't developed an adequate feel of *how* he himself hooks his Parent, of how he himself retroflects. For while the nucleus of the Parent/Topdog was undoubtedly formed in early years, *its strength is supplied by nothing other than the energies of present-day retroflections*. Where the Transactional Analysis spots and deals with the Parent, Gestalt tackles the retroflections—two sides of the same therapeutic pro-

cess.* And as the Individual comes to understand just that fact, he learns the corollary to the second basic synthesizing rule: to stay in the Adult is to refuse to retroreflect.

Perhaps this is the point to mention a most crucial event that occurs in the process of retroreflection. Once an impulse is retroflected, it generally changes its form to *con-form* to its new object, the self. An impulse to hit an object or person is carried out with a striking motion in the arm, shoulder, and fist. Should that impulse be retroflected, however, the person doesn't so much smash himself in the face as he locks and immobilizes those muscles of the arm, shoulder and fist. He doesn't keep striking himself, he freezes himself. Nevertheless, this is still a type of attack on himself, but the impulse has merely con-formed to its new object: his body. The result is stalemate, spasm—vast amounts of energy committed to dynamic inaction. In such fashion, constructive biological aggression, when retroflected, con-forms into destructive self-aggression; or lively curiosity con-forms into morbid introspection. It is only when the retroreflection is reversed that the con-formed impulse is released, given true expression, and thus *trans-formed* back into its original and less destructive dimensions. This trans-formation is important for the individual to understand, or he will likely refuse to turn outward the impulses that seem so obviously destructive. If he understands, however, that their reversal trans-forms them, he will be able to experiment with staying in the Adult where before he refused to do so.

One other point here: a retroflected impulse does not really find an adequate object in the self—that is to say, a con-formed impulse is never completely satisfied. On the theory that something is better than nothing, the Parent will nevertheless keep directing blows at the Child—but this is a poor substitute (cf. Freudian “substitute gratifications”). As such, the con-formed impulse frequently intensifies its strength in an effort to find true and satisfactory expression (“return of the repressed”). A retroreflector thus tends to increase his retroreflecting activity. And all of these retroreflections, it should be further noted, are not bound up with just emotional impulses; on the contrary, personal traits, feelings, ideas, characteristics, convictions—all can be and usually are interwoven with retroflected impulses and emotions.

Thus, for example, a person who retroreflects hostility will feel a mo-

*Both T.A. and G.T. stress the dissolving, or rather assimilating, of introjections, and this is not to be overlooked in therapy. Because of the agreement of the two schools on this point, I am not emphasizing it here.

ment of self-reproach and self-hate. If this activity becomes chronic, however, the person will start to invent reasons for her self-hatred in order to make sense of her behavior. She will come to feel her self-hatred “justified” because she’s too poor, or too fat, or too old, or too sick, or too dumb—any intelligible reason will do. The active side hates the passive side—the Parent beats the Child—“because” it’s such-and-such. On the other hand, there are some cases in which the traits or ideas may be said to precede the retroflection. A person who is, for instance, rather heavyset, may indeed retroflect hostility back on himself, due to unkind cultural introjects, and hate with an unbridled passion his body. Which actually precedes which is not so much the point—rather, I wish only to emphasize that ideas, traits, characteristics, and concepts are frequently bound up with retroflected emotions and con-formed impulses.

We will presently return to the undoing of retroflections, but first let us investigate the precise relation of retroflection to projection. This investigation is necessary for the final form of our synthesis of Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Therapy. For by grasping the actual relation between the mechanism of retroflection and the mechanism of projection—a relation that I have never seen stated in any of the literature—we will also be able to expand and extend upon the first two preliminary synthesizing rules. In this expansion, we will be able to subdivide these two basic rules, resulting in a more comprehensive synthesis.

We have seen that all projections can be reduced to retroflections, and that this is exactly how Gestalt Therapy proceeds. But theoretically, how is this possible? What is the connection? I would like to suggest that the connecting link between retroflection and projection is just this: all projections are actually projected retroflections. Projection is simply the next step after retroflection on a continuum of alienation, and for this very reason can and should be reduced back to retroflection during therapy.

We can approach this as follows. Recall that retroflection results in the splitting of the personality into an active pincher-and-doer (associated with the Parent), and a passive pinched-and-done-to (associated with the Child), with the individual usually associating himself more closely with one or the other side. Now not only can the person associate more-or-less with one side of the retroflection, he *can totally repress, and thus project, the other side*, so that the projected side now appears to belong not to him but to the environment. Further, the projected pole of the retroflection *bears the same functional relation to the remaining*

pole as it did in the original retroflection—a fact that allows us to easily unravel the projection.

For example, the sexual impulse. A person who, through frustration, shame or conscience chronically retroflects his sexual desires will take himself as the object of his sexual activities. His only direct sexual outlet will be masturbation. Now while it is true that he may reach intense orgasms this way—principally because he’s minding his own business—glowing satisfaction eludes him, because he’s now operating on a con-formed impulse. If he associates with the active pole of the retroflection, he is likely to have fantasies of seducing or even raping someone; if he associates more with the passive side, he might have fantasies of being seduced or raped. But if he projects the active-doer side, he will feel himself to totally lack any sexual impulses, but everybody out there has strange designs on him! He is likely to be prudish or perhaps frigid, and should sex happen to come his way he can at best dutifully submit. But should he project the passive done-to side of himself, he becomes the wolf—he actively seeks to regain the alienated aspects of himself by uniting sexually with those onto whom he projects them. Of course, that never really provides the sought-after satisfaction, because the wolf (who thinks he’s “oversexed”) is acting on a con-formed impulse instead of the trans-formed one. For this reason his sexual affairs are unstable and unsatisfactory, each one being rather transitory as he chases forever onward after his own shadow, making love to himself with the help of any willing human mirror.

Thus we see that in retroflection, a person can associate with one or the other side of that retroflection; and further, this process, carried to extremes, results in the actual projection of the dissociated pole. To use the terms of Transactional Analysis, in retroflection we merely associate with the Parent or Child; in projection we cast out the Parent or Child, and perceive it in the environment. *But at all times the two poles maintain the same functional relation and direction to one another.*

Thus, to give another example of this entire process, with emphasis on the maintenance of the same functional relation of the poles, let’s take the impulse of a person to *reject*, on valid grounds, those things or people in the environment rightly deserving of some criticism. If the impulse is retroflected, and the person associates more with the active Parent side of the retroflection, she will constantly criticize herself: a self-criticism complex. If she associates more with the passive done-to side, she will begin to develop a creeping inferiority complex, as her Child buckles under the tortuous criticisms of the Parent. Now if she

projects the Parent, she is left only with her Child, and she sees her Parent instead everywhere in the environment, especially in policemen, teachers, or other authority figures. The world is constantly out to get her—and she develops a persecution complex. If, however, she projects the Child, she is left identified with only the Parent, continually criticizing not so much the Child traits of others as her own projected Child traits she imagines she sees in others. This can result in anything from annoyance to prejudice.

We can therefore establish the following continuum of alienation: expression to suppression to retroflection to projection. And in therapy, we simply reverse the order, starting with projection.

Fritz Perls (1969a, p. 237) used to say that projection was the mechanism whereby an individual converts organismic activity into passivity, “I act on this” into “This acts on me,” “I happen to things” into “Things happen to me.” While this is certainly true, it applies mainly to only one of the two major classes of projection, namely, the projected Topdog/Parent. When this occurs, a person’s active approach to the environment is indeed converted into a re-active response to the environment. But an individual can also project the passive side of a retroflection, and then he is apt to respond to these projected facets in a most violently active manner, shadow-boxing his way through the valleys of his own reflections.

To start with the former, recall the genesis of this class of projections: an impulse spontaneously arises (e.g., I desire to pinch someone); this impulse is interrupted and retroflected (I pinch myself); the active pole of this retroflection is projected (Others are pinching me). Now when a person forgets *how* he is pinching himself, this is retroflection—he is aware, however vaguely, that *he* is pinching himself, but he doesn’t quite know how he’s doing it and thus he can’t stop. But when the individual then forgets not only *how* the retroflection is accomplished but also that it is *he* who is doing it, this is projection—he isn’t pinching himself, the world is! Conversely, when he sees that *he*, not someone else, is pinching himself, he has taken back the projection; when he further sees *how* he is pinching himself, he has mastered the retroflection. He is finally free to pinch others—but now with a trans-formed impulse, not a harsh conformed one.

Projections might show up in dreams, in other people, in things or events. In all cases, they are simply the hooks upon which the projections are hung. These things then seem to pinch him—people are hurting him, laughing at him, staring at him, rejecting him, chasing him, hating him

. . . In Gestalt Therapy, the person will likely be asked to initiate a dialogue, in fantasy, between himself and the person who seems to be pinching him. By playing both parts and identifying completely with the “pinching person,” the individual comes to realize that it is *he* who is really doing the pinching to himself. In effect, the individual has taken back the projected Parent/Topdog; his projections have been reduced to the prior retroflections.

The person understands that he is hurting himself, and now—to undo this retroflection—he must regain the feel of *how* he is accomplishing this feat. So he plays the role of the pincher, the Topdog/Parent. In fact, he plays it up—he is asked to increase the symptom, to exaggerate it, to harden his pinching. No longer is he trying to fight the symptom, he is trying to increase it! “As long as you fight a symptom, it will become worse. If you take responsibility for what you are doing to yourself, how you produce your symptoms, how you produce your illness, how you produce your existence—the very moment you get in touch with yourself—growth begins, integration begins” (Perls, 1969b, p. 178).

As long as the person is fighting the symptom, he is tacitly assuming that it is not he who is producing it—and that means nothing other than that he is out of touch with the side of himself that *is* doing the pinching. To try to silence the symptom is only to try to silence responsibility for it, and that is precisely what started the problem in the first place. Besides, the symptom contains the con-formed impulse, and thus to fight the symptom is to further alienate the impulse which seeks expression. Instead, the person is asked to get into the symptom, exaggerate it, increase it—for he is, by that very activity, assuming responsibility for it. He is learning *how* he actually produces his symptoms by consciously *trying* to produce them.

As the person is thus playing the pincher, the Topdog/Parent, exaggerating his symptoms, getting the feel of himself as a retroflector, a squeezer, a pincher—he is asked to “make the rounds” *while playing the Topdog*. That is, while playing the dictatorial and imperious Super Mouse, he addresses the members of the group (or some person in fantasy), doing unto them what he has heretofore been doing so unmercifully unto himself. But a strange thing has now happened—by this very act he has reversed the retroflection, and is aiming his impulses toward the original object: the environment. And although the impulse thus directed outward might at first be rather harsh—because it is the con-formed impulse he’s used to aiming at himself—it softens quickly as it is trans-formed back into its original dimensions.

With this additional understanding of retroflection and projection, we are in a position to draw up our final synthesizing conclusions. Our study of Gestalt Therapy showed us that there are two major classes of retroflection (associated with the active pole and the passive pole), and two major classes of projections (projection of active pole and of passive pole), giving in all a total of *four basic patterns of avoidance*. But recall that Transactional Analysis also acknowledges four major patterns of refusing to stay in the Adult (Parent aimed inwardly, Parent aimed outwardly, Child aimed inwardly, Child aimed outwardly). In fact, these are both the same four patterns of irresponsibility, and Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Therapy embody complementary therapeutic approaches to just these four patterns. Understanding this, we can now set out all four major synthesizing rules:*

1. When the Child is hooked and aimed outwardly, we look for a projection; specifically, we look for the projection of the active pole of the retroflection, the Parent/Topdog.
2. When the Parent is hooked and aimed inwardly, we look for a retroflection; specifically, the person is associated more or less with the active pole of the retroflection.
3. When the Parent is hooked and aimed outwardly, we look for a projection; specifically, we look for the projection of the passive pole of the retroflection, the Child/Underdog.
4. When the Child is hooked and aimed inwardly, we look for a retroflection; specifically, the person is associated more or less with the passive pole of the retroflection.

With regard to each of these four modes, to “stay in the Adult” is to assume responsibility for that mode of avoidance and thus to refuse to operate in it unconsciously. In this sense, therapy is simply a day-to-day strengthening of that responsibility.

From a practical standpoint, a person beginning therapy (either self, dyad, or group) can grasp the fundamentals of Parent-Adult-Child within the hour: that she has Parent and Child tapes, as well as the ability to function as the Adult; that in times of stress and impasse she

*There are certainly numerous variations on these four basic patterns; e.g., the Child is not always associated with the passive pole. But these do seem to me to be the four most basic and most prevalent patterns—most others can be reduced to one of these four.

chooses to turn off the Adult and reactivate the Parent or Child tapes. She can learn to recognize and thoroughly differentiate the Parent, Child, and Adult. This understanding alone, when matured, is often quite helpful, for to the extent she can stay in the Adult, retroreflections and projections—as we explained—*tend* to fall away of themselves. At any rate, she can then proceed to develop the understanding that she herself is turning on the tapes of the Parent or Child. To the extent this understanding crystallizes, her projections are reduced to retroreflections. Consequently, she can then actively begin to explore just *how* it is that she turns on the tapes—and thus, she is then free to turn them off, releasing and re-directing the previously retroflected energies. This basic procedure is supported by a comprehensive understanding of the four basic rules suggested above; and, should the therapist or individual wish, can be supplemented by script or game analysis.

The reason I have not mentioned game analysis in this synthesis is that I fully agree with Harris (1969) that successful game analysis usually rests upon an accurate structural analysis. Thus, game analysis—in psychotherapy at least—is often secondary to structural and transactional analysis, and in our synthesis it is secondary to a grasp of the four synthetic patterns outlined above. It is in this deeper level of individual psychology that we have sought a fundamental synthesis, and thus, should game analysis be deemed necessary, it can then be carried out as an extension of the four basic patterns of avoidance. We need only note that in duplex transactional games, the psychological level of the game rests upon one (or more) of these four basic patterns.

Thus, to give only one example, we can look at that most famous of games, “If It Weren’t For You,” or IWFY for short. In my opinion, the person who is “it” in IWFY is psychologically operating from pattern number one. That is, the person is a self-frustrator but, projecting the active pole of that retroreflection, feels that not *he* but the world is holding him back. He knows that somebody is holding him back, but since it obviously isn’t him, it must be somebody else. And he needs a volunteer. He will even, if necessary, actively seek out a “hook” for the projection lest he be faced with his own self-frustrating activities. The Child is in control, looking externally for its own frustrating Parent.

In the most notorious variation of IWFY, namely Marital Style, enter the spouse: and there, out in the environment, in the form of the dearly beloved, the individual beholds nothing other than his own alienated shadow, his own frustrator tendencies. “The *nerve* of that fink, holding *me* back from such-and-such!” The individual, of course, feels—

superficially at least—that such-and-such is really what he wants to do above all else, and that he would do just that with a passion, “if it weren’t for you.” If the spouse, the intended hook of the projection, swallows it line and sinker, the game is under way. The spouse will probably respond from pattern number three, “Don’t you dare try such-and-such, you can’t handle it!” Or, the spouse might act from pattern number four, “You’re right, I am a fink.” At any rate, the point I wish to emphasize is that in all transactions, if a person reacts to, for example, another person coming on as Child, he is really reacting to his own *projected* Child, or facets of that Child. This is often overlooked by Transactional Analysts because the projection might be a perfect fit and thus escape detection. Nevertheless, in all cases a person can have insight into another’s motivations only by analogy with *his own* feelings.

Now the spouse might instead refuse the projection. The spouse might respond from the position of the Adult with “Go ahead, great idea!” This instantly places the individual in a quandary, for he still knows *somebody* is holding him back, but since it’s not the spouse, who could it be? The person is left, we might say, with his projection dangling. He could, at this point, begin to reown his projection by converting it to its prior retroflection, translating “If It Weren’t For You” into “If It Weren’t For Me.” More likely he will try to maintain the projection by switching to another game, such as “Why Don’t You—Yes But,” and ending up with, “Ain’t It Awful.” The projection of the active pole of the retroflection is simply transferred to new hooks until it gets a sucker to bite. The social payoff of the game is the “catch and kill”; the psychological payoff is the maintenance of a mechanism of avoidance.

With all of this, it is worthwhile to keep in mind Harris’ conclusion:

It is my firm belief from long observation of this phenomenon that game analysis must always be secondary to Structural and Transactional Analysis. Knowing what game you are playing does not, *ipso facto*, make it possible for you to change. (Harris, 1969, pp. 150–51)

What does make change possible is an understanding and implementation of Transactional Analysis, or Gestalt Therapy, or—in my opinion—a working synthesis of both. And that is exactly what I have tried to present in this paper—a pragmatic synthesis of the best elements of Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Therapy that provides a simple but powerful therapeutic system.

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