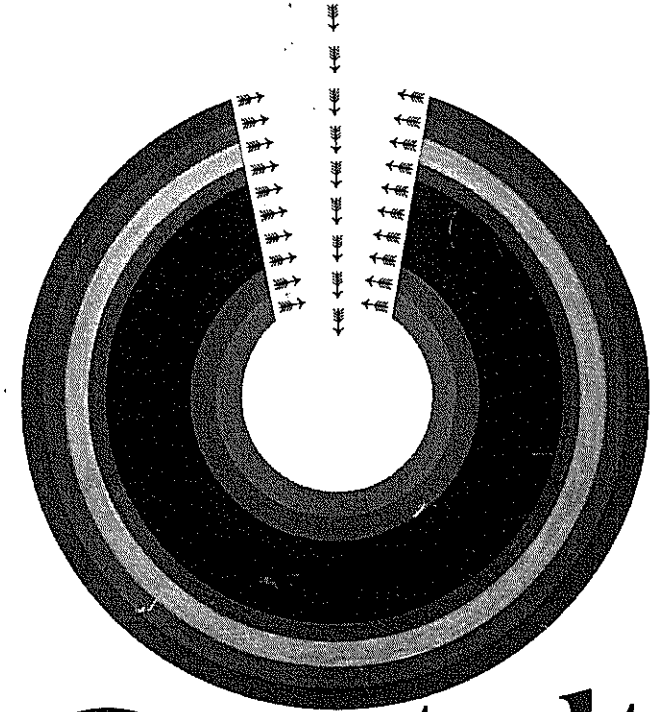




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Gestalt Therapy Verbatim

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An action approach to deepening
awareness and living fully in the
Here and Now, as experienced in
workshops at Esalen Institute

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Now let me tell you of a dilemma which is not easy to understand. It's like a *koan*—those Zen questions which seem to be insoluble. The *koan* is: *Nothing exists except the here and now*. The *now* is the present, is the phenomenon, is what you are aware of, is that moment in which you carry your so-called memories and your so-called anticipations with you. Whether you remember or anticipate, you do it *now*. The past is no more. The future is not yet. When I say, "I was," that's not now, that's the past. When I say, "I want to," that's the future, it's not yet. Nothing can possibly exist except the now. Some people then make a program out of this. They make a demand, "You *should* live in the here and now." And I say it's *not possible* to live in the here and now, and yet nothing exists except the here and now.

How do we resolve this dilemma? What is buried in the word *now*? How come it takes years and years to understand a simple word like the word *now*? If I play a phonograph record, the sound of the record appears when the record and the needle touch each other, where they make contact. There is no sound of the before, there is no sound of the afterwards. If I stop the phonograph record, then the needle is still in contact with the record but there is no music, because there is the *absolute* now. If you would blot out the past, or the anticipation of themes three minutes from now, you could not understand listening to that record you are now playing. But if you blot out the now, nothing will come through. So again, whether we remember or whether we anticipate, we do it *here and now*.

Maybe if I say the *now* is not the scale but the point of suspense, it's a zero point, it is a nothingness, and that

is the *now*. The very moment I feel that I experience something and I talk about it, I pay attention to it, that moment is already gone. So what's the use of talking about the *now*? It has many uses, very many uses.

Let's talk first about the past. *Now*, I am pulling memories out of my drawer and possibly believe that these memories are identical with my history. That's never true, because a memory is an abstraction. Right now, you experience something. You experience me, you experience your thoughts, you experience your posture perhaps, but you can't experience *everything*. You always abstract the relevant gestalt from the total context. Now if you take these abstractions and file them away, then you call them memories. If these memories are unpleasant, especially if they are unpleasant to our self-esteem, we change them. As Nietzsche said: "Memory and Pride were fighting. Memory said, 'It was like this' and Pride said, 'It couldn't have been like this'—and Memory gives in." You all know how much you are lying. You all know how much you are deceiving yourselves, how many of your memories are exaggerations and projections, how many of your memories are patched up and distorted.

The past is past. And yet—in the now, in our being, we carry much of the past with us. But we carry much of the past with us only as far as we have unfinished situations. What happened in the past is either assimilated and has become a part of us, or we carry around an unfinished situation, an incomplete gestalt. Let me give you as an example, the most famous of the unfinished situations is the fact that we have not forgiven our parents. As you know, parents are never right. They are either too large or too small, too smart or too dumb. If they are stern, they should be soft, and so on. But when do you find parents who are all right? You can always blame the parents if you want to play the blaming game, and make the parents responsible for all your problems. Until you are willing to let go of your parents, you continue to conceive of yourself as a child. But to get closure and let go of the parents and say, "I am a big girl, now," is a different story. This is part of therapy—to let go of

parents, and especially to forgive one's parents, which is the hardest thing for most people to do.

The great error of psychoanalysis is in assuming that the memory is reality. All the so-called *traumata*, which are supposed to be the root of the neurosis, are an invention of the patient to save his self-esteem. None of these traumata has ever been proved to exist. I haven't seen a single case of infantile trauma that wasn't a falsification. They are all lies to be hung onto in order to justify one's unwillingness to grow. To mature means to take responsibility for your life, to be on your own. Psychoanalysis fosters the infantile state by considering that the past is responsible for the illness. The patient isn't responsible—no, the trauma is responsible, or the Oedipus complex is responsible, and so on. I suggest that you read a beautiful little pocketbook called *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, by Hannah Green. There you see a typical example, how that girl invented this childhood trauma, to have her *raison d'être*, her basis to fight the world, her justification for her craziness, her illness. We have got such an idea about the importance of this invented memory, where the whole illness is supposed to be based on this memory. No wonder that all the wild goose chase of the psychoanalyst to find out *why* I am now like this can never come to an end, can never prove a real opening up of the person himself.

Freud devoted his whole life to prove to himself and to others that sex is not bad, and he had to prove this scientifically. In his time, the scientific approach was that of causality, that the trouble was *caused* by something in the past, like a billiard cue pushing a billiard ball, and the cue then is the cause of the rolling of the ball. In the meantime, our scientific attitude has changed. We don't look to the world any more in terms of cause and effect: We look upon the world as a continuous ongoing process. We are back to Heraclitus, to the pre-Socratic idea that everything is in a flux. We never step into the same river twice. In other words, we have made—in science, but unfortunately not yet in psychiatry—the

transition from linear causality to thinking of process, from the *why* to the *how*.

If you ask *how*, you look at the structure, you see what's going on now, a deeper understanding of the process. The *how* is all we need to understand how we or the world functions. The *how* gives us perspective, orientation. The *how* shows that one of the basic laws, the identity of structure and function, is valid. If we change the structure, the function changes. If we change the function, the structure changes.

I know you want to ask *why*, like every child, like every immature person asks *why*, to get rationalization or explanation. But the *why* at best leads to clever explanation, but never to an understanding. *Why* and *because* are dirty words in Gestalt Therapy. They lead only to rationalization, and belong to the second class of verbiage production. I distinguish three classes of verbiage production: chickenshit—this is "good morning," "how are you," and so on; bullshit—this is "because," rationalization, excuses; and elephantshit—this is when you talk about philosophy, existential Gestalt Therapy, etc.—what I am doing now. The *why* gives only unending inquiries into the cause of the cause of the cause of the cause of the cause of the cause. And as Freud has already observed, every event is *over-determined*, has *many* causes; all kinds of things come together in order to create the specific moment that is the *now*. Many factors come together to create this specific unique person which is *I*. Nobody can at any given moment be different from what he is at this moment, including all the wishes and prayers that he should be different. We are what we are.

These are the two legs upon which Gestalt Therapy walks: *now* and *how*. The essence of the theory of Gestalt Therapy is in the understanding of these two words. *Now* covers all that exists. The past is no more, the future is not yet. *Now* includes the balance of being here, is experiencing, involvement, phenomenon, awareness. *How* covers everything that is structure, behavior, all that is actually going on—the ongoing process. All the rest is irrelevant—computing, apprehending, and so on.

Everything is grounded in *awareness*. *Awareness* is the only basis of knowledge, communication, and so on. In communication, you have to understand that you want to make the other person *aware of something*: aware of yourself, aware of what's to be noticed in the other person, etc. And in order to communicate, we have to make sure that we are *senders*, which means that the message which we send can be understood; and also to make sure that we are *receivers*—that we are willing to listen to the message from the other person. It is very rare that people can talk *and* listen. Very few people can listen without talking. Most people can talk without listening. And if you're busy talking you have no time to listen. The integration of talking and listening is a really rare thing. Most people don't listen and give an honest response, but just put the other person off with a question. Instead of listening and answering, immediately comes a counter-attack, a question or something that diverts, deflects, dodges. We are going to talk a lot about blocks in sending messages, in giving yourself, in making others aware of your self, and in the same way, of being willing to be open to the other person—to be receivers. Without communication, there cannot be contact. There will be only isolation and boredom.

So I would like to reinforce what I just said, and I would like you to pair up, and to talk to each other for five minutes about your actual present awareness of yourself now and your awareness of the other. Always underline the *how*—*how* do you behave *now*, *how* do you sit, *how* do you talk, all the details of what goes on *now*. *How* does he sit, *how* does he look. . .

So how about the future? We don't know anything about the future. If we all had crystal balls, even then we wouldn't experience the future. We would experience a *vision* of the future. And all this is taking place here and now. We imagine, we anticipate the future because we don't want to have a future. So the most important existential saying is, we don't want to have a future, we are afraid of the future. We fill in the gap where there should be a future with insurance policies, status quo, sameness,

anything so as not to experience the possibility of openness towards the future.

We also cannot stand the nothingness, the openness, of the past. We are not willing to have the idea of eternity—"It has always been"—so we have to fill it in with the story of creation. Time has started somehow. People ask, "When did time begin?" The same applies to the future. It seems incredible that we could live without goals, without worrying about the future, that we could be open and ready for what might come. No; we have to make sure that we have no future, that the status quo should remain, even be a little bit better. But we mustn't take risks, we mustn't be open to the future. Something could happen that would be new and exciting, and contributing to our growth. It's too dangerous to take the growth risk. We would rather walk this earth as half-corpses than live dangerously, and realize that this living dangerously is much safer than this insurance-life of safety and not taking risks, which most of us decide to do.

What is this funny thing, risk-taking? Has anybody a definition for risk-taking? What's involved in risk-taking?

- A: Getting hurt.
- B: Taking a dare.
- C: Going too far.
- D: A hazardous attempt.
- E: Inviting danger.

Now you notice you all see the catastrophic expectation, the negative side. You don't see the possible gain. If there was only the negative side, you just would avoid it, wouldn't you? Risk-taking is a suspense between catastrophic and anastrophic expectations. You have to see *both* sides of the picture. You might gain, and you might lose.

One of the most important moments in my life was after I had escaped Germany and there was a position as a training analyst available in South Africa, and Ernest Jones wanted to know who wanted to go. There were four of us: three wanted guarantees. I said I take a risk. All the other three were caught by the Nazis. I took a risk and I'm still alive.

An absolutely healthy person is completely in touch with himself and with reality. The crazy person, the psychotic, is more or less completely *out* of touch with both, but mostly with *either* himself *or* the world. We are in between being psychotic and being healthy, and this is based upon the fact that we have *two* levels of existence. One is reality, the actual, realistic level, that we are in touch with whatever goes on now, in touch with our feelings, in touch with our senses. Reality is awareness of ongoing experience, actual touching, seeing, moving, doing. The other level we don't have a good word for, so I choose the Indian word *maya*. *Maya* means something like illusion, or fantasy, or philosophically speaking, the *as if* of Vaithinger. *Maya* is a kind of dream, a kind of trance. Very often this fantasy, this *maya*, is called the mind, but if you look a bit closer, what you call "mind" is fantasy. It's the rehearsal stage. Freud once said: "*Denken ist prober arbeit*"—thinking is rehearsing, trying out. Unfortunately, Freud never followed up this discovery because it would be inconsistent with his genetic approach. If he had accepted this statement of his, "Thinking is rehearsing," he would have realized how our fantasy activity is turned toward the future, because we rehearse for the future.

We live on two levels—the public level which is our *doing*, which is observable, verifiable; and the private stage, the thinking stage, the rehearsing stage, on which we prepare for the future roles we want to play. Thinking is a private stage, where you try out. You talk to some person unknown, you talk to yourself, you prepare for an important event, you talk to the beloved before your appointment or disappointment, whatever you expect it to be. For instance, if I were to ask, "Who wants to come up here to work?" you probably would quickly start to rehearse. "What shall I do there?" and so on. And of course probably you will get stage fright, because you leave the secure reality of the now and jump into the future. Psychiatry makes a big fuss out of the symptom *anxiety*, and we live in an age of anxiety, but anxiety is nothing but the tension from the *now* to the *then*. There

are few people who can stand this tension, so they have to fill the gap with rehearsing, planning, "making sure," making sure that they don't have a future. They try to hold onto the sameness, and this of course will prevent any possibility of growth or spontaneity.

Q: Of course the past sets up anxiety too, doesn't it?

F: No. The past sets up—or let's say is still present with unfinished situations, regrets and things like this. If you feel anxiety about what you have done, it's not anxiety about what you have done, but anxiety about what will be the punishment to come in the future.

Freud once said the person who is free from anxiety and guilt is healthy. I spoke about anxiety already. I didn't speak about guilt. Now, in the Freudian system, the guilt is very complicated. In Gestalt Therapy, the guilt thing is much simpler. We see guilt as projected *resentment*. Whenever you feel guilty, find out what you resent, and the guilt will vanish and you will try to make the other person feel guilty.

Anything unexpressed which wants to be expressed can make you feel uncomfortable. And one of the most common unexpressed experiences is the resentment. This is the unfinished situation *par excellence*. If you are resentful, you're stuck; you neither can move forward and have it out, express your anger, change the world so that you'll get satisfaction, nor can you let go and forget whatever disturbs you. Resentment is the psychological equivalent of the hanging-on bite—the tight jaw. The hanging-on bite can neither let go, nor bite through and chew up—whichever is required. In resentment you can neither let go and forget, and let this incident or person recede in the background, nor can you actively tackle it. The expression of resentment is one of the most important ways to help you to make your life a little bit more easy. Now I want you all to do the following collective experiment:

I want each one of you to do this. First you evoke a person like father or husband, call the person by name—whoever it is—and just say briefly, "Clara, I resent—" Try to get the person to hear you, as if there was really com-

munication and you felt this. So try to speak to the person, and establish in these communications that this person should listen to you. Just become aware of how difficult it is to mobilize your fantasy. Express your resentment—kind of present it right into his or her face. Try to realize at the same time that you don't dare, really, to express your anger, nor would you be generous enough to let go, to be forgiving. Okeh, go ahead. . .

There is another great advantage to using resentment in therapy, in growth. Behind every resentment there are demands. So now I want all of you to talk directly to the same person as before, and express the demands behind the resentments. The demand is the only real form of communication. Get your demands into the open. Do this also as self-expression: formulate your demands in the form of an imperative, a command. I guess you know enough of English grammar to know what an imperative is. The imperative is like "Shut up!" "Go to hell!" "Do this!" . . .

Now go back to the resentments you expressed toward the person. Remember *exactly* what you resented. Scratch out the word *resent* and say *appreciate*. Appreciate what you resented before. Then go on to tell this person what else you appreciate in them. Again try to get the feeling that you actually communicate with them. . .

You see, if there were no appreciations, you wouldn't be stuck with this person and you could just forget him. There is always the other side. For instance, my appreciation of Hitler: If Hitler had not come to power, I probably would have been dead by now as a good psychoanalyst who lives on eight patients for the rest of his life.

If you have any difficulties in communication with somebody, look for your resentments. Resentments are among the worst possible unfinished situations—unfinished gestalts. If you resent, you can neither let go nor have it out. Resentment is an emotion of central importance. The resentment is the most important expression of an impasse—of being stuck. If you feel resentment, be able to express your resentment. A resentment unexpressed often is experienced as, or changes into, feelings of guilt. Whenever

you feel guilty, find out what you are resenting and express it and make your demands explicit. This alone will help a lot.

Awareness covers, so to speak, three layers or three zones: awareness of the *self*, awareness of the *world*, and awareness of what's between—the intermediate zone of fantasy that prevents a person from being in touch with either himself or the world. This is Freud's great discovery—that there is something between you and the world. There are so many processes going on in one's fantasies. A complex is what he calls it, or a prejudice. If you have prejudices, then your relationship to the world is very much disturbed and destroyed. If you want to approach a person with a prejudice, you can't get to the person. You always will contact only the prejudice, the fixed idea. So Freud's idea that the intermediate zone, the DMZ, this no-man's land between you and the world should be eliminated, emptied out, brainwashed or whatever you want to call it, was perfectly right. The only trouble is that Freud stayed in that zone and analyzed this intermediate thing. He didn't consider the self-awareness or world-awareness; he didn't consider what we can do to be in touch again.

This loss of contact with our authentic self, and loss of contact with the world, is due to this intermediate zone, the big area of *maya* that we carry with us. That is, there is a big area of fantasy activity that takes up so much of our excitement, of our energy, of our life force, that there is very little energy left to be in touch with reality. Now, if we want to make a person whole, we have first to understand what is merely fantasy and irrationality, and we have to discover where one is in touch, and with what. And very often if we work, and we empty out this middle zone of fantasy, this *maya*, then there is the experience of *satori*, of waking up. Suddenly the world is *there*. You wake up from a trance like you wake up from a dream. You're all there again. And the aim in therapy, the growth aim, is to lose more and more of your "mind" and come more to your *senses*. To be more and more in touch, to be in touch with yourself and in touch with the world,

instead of only in touch with the fantasies, prejudices, apprehensions, and so on.

If a person confuses *maya* and reality, if he takes fantasy for reality, then he is neurotic or even psychotic. I give you an extreme case of psychosis, the schizophrenic who imagines the doctor is after him, so he decides to beat him to the punch and shoot the doctor, without checking up on reality. On the other hand, there is another possibility. Instead of being divided between *maya* and reality, we can integrate these two, and if *maya* and reality are integrated, we call it art. Great art is real, and great art is at the same time an illusion.

Fantasy can be creative, but it's creative only if you have the fantasy, whatever it is, in the *now*. In the *now*, you use what is available, and you are bound to be creative. Just watch children in their play. What's available is usable and then something happens, something comes out of the being in touch with what is *here* and *now*.

There is only one way to bring about this state of healthy spontaneity, to save the genuineness of the human being. Or, to talk in trite religious terms, there is only one way to regain our soul, or in American terms, to revive the American corpse and bring him back to life. The paradox is that in order to get this spontaneity, we need, like in Zen, an utmost discipline. The discipline is simply to understand the words *now* and *how*, and to bracket off and put aside anything that is not contained in the words *now* and *how*.

Now what's the technique we are using in Gestalt Therapy? The technique is to establish a *continuum of awareness*. This continuum of awareness is required so that the organism can work on the healthy gestalt principle: that the most important unfinished situation will always emerge and can be dealt with. If we prevent ourselves from achieving this gestalt formation, we function badly and we carry hundreds and thousands of unfinished situations with us, that always demand completion.

This continuum of awareness seems to be very simple, just to be aware from second to second what's going on. Unless we are asleep, we are always aware of some-

thing. However, as soon as this awareness becomes unpleasant, most people will interrupt it. Then suddenly they start intellectualizing, bullshitting, the flight into the past, the flight into expectations, good intentions, or schizophrenically using free associations, jumping like a grasshopper from experience to experience, and none of these experiences are ever *experienced*, but just a kind of a flash, which leaves all the available material unassimilated and unused.

Now how do we proceed in Gestalt Therapy? What is nowadays quite fashionable was very much pooh-poohed when I started this idea of *everything is awareness*. The purely verbal approach, the Freudian approach in which I was brought up, barks up the wrong tree. Freud's idea was that by a certain procedure called free-association, you can liberate the disowned part of the personality and put it at the disposal of the person and then the person will develop what he called a strong ego. What Freud called association, I call *dissociation*, schizophrenic dissociation to avoid the experience. It's a computer game, an interpretation-computer game, which is exactly an avoidance of the experience of what *is*. You can talk 'til doomsday, you can chase your childhood memories to doomsday, but nothing will change. You can associate—or dissociate—a hundred things to one event, but you can only experience one reality.

So, in contrast to Freud who placed the greatest emphasis on resistances, I have placed the greatest emphasis on *phobic attitude, avoidance, flight from*. Maybe some of you know that Freud's illness was that he suffered from an immense number of phobias, and as he had this illness, of course he had to avoid coping with avoidance. His phobic attitude was tremendous. He couldn't look at a patient—couldn't face having an encounter with the patient—so he had him lie on a couch, and Freud's symptom became the trademark of psychoanalysis. He couldn't go into the open to be photographed, and so on. But usually, if you come to think of it, most of us would rather avoid unpleasant situations and we mobilize all the armor, masks, and so on, a procedure which is usually known as

the "repression." So, I try to find out from the patient what he *avoids*.

The enemy of development is this pain phobia—the unwillingness to do a tiny bit of suffering. You see, pain is a signal of nature. The painful leg, the painful feeling, cries out, "Pay attention to me—if you don't pay attention, things will get worse." The broken leg cries, "Don't walk so much. Keep still." We use this fact in Gestalt Therapy by understanding that the awareness continuum is being interrupted—that you become phobic—as soon as you begin to feel something unpleasant. When you begin to feel uncomfortable, you take away your attention.

So the therapeutic agent, the means of development, is to integrate *attention* and *awareness*. Often psychology doesn't differentiate between awareness and attention. Attention is a deliberate way of listening to the emerging foreground figure, which in this case is something unpleasant. So what I do as therapist is to work as a catalyst both ways: provide situations in which a person can experience this being stuck—the unpleasantness—and I frustrate his avoidances still further, until he is willing to mobilize his own resources.

Authenticity, maturity, responsibility for one's actions and life, response-ability, and living in the now, having the creativeness of the now available, is all one and the same thing. Only in the now, are you in touch with what's going on. If the now becomes painful, most people are ready to throw the now overboard and avoid the painful situation. Most people can't even suffer themselves. So in therapy the person might simply become phobic and run away or he might play games which will lead our effort *ad absurdum*—like making a fool out of the situation or playing the bear-trapper game. You probably know the bear-trappers. The bear-trappers suck you in and give you the come-on, and when you're sucked in, down comes the hatchet and you stand there with a bloody nose, head, or whatever. And if you are fool enough to ram your head against the wall until you begin to bleed and be exasperated, then the bear-trapper enjoys himself and enjoys the control he has over you, to render

you inadequate, impotent, and he enjoys his victorious self which does a lot for his feeble self-esteem. Or you have the Mona Lisa smiler. They smile and smile, and all the time think, "You're such a fool." And nothing penetrates. Or you have the drive-us-crazy, whose only interest in life is to drive themselves or their spouse or their environment crazy and then fish in troubled waters.

But with these exceptions, anyone who has a little bit of goodwill will benefit from the Gestalt approach because the simplicity of the Gestalt approach is that we pay attention to the obvious, to the utmost surface. We don't delve into a region which we don't know anything about, into the so-called "unconscious." I don't believe in repressions. The whole theory of repression is a fallacy. We can't repress a need. We have only repressed certain expressions of these needs. We have blocked one side, and then the self-expression comes out somewhere else, in our movements, in our posture, and most of all in our voice. A good therapist doesn't listen to the content of the bullshit the patient produces, but to the sound, to the music, to the hesitations. Verbal communication is usually a lie. The real communication is beyond words. There is a very good book available, *The Voice of Neurosis*, by Paul Moses, a psychologist from San Francisco who died recently. He could give you a diagnosis from the voice that is better than the Rorschach test.

So don't listen to the words, just listen to what the voice tells you, what the movements tell you, what the posture tells you, what the image tells you. If you have ears, then you know all about the other person. You don't have to listen to *what* the person says: listen to the sounds. *Per sona*—"through sound." The sounds tell you everything. Everything a person wants to express is all there—not in words. What we say is mostly either lies or bullshit. But the voice is there, the gesture, the posture, the facial expression, the psychosomatic language. It's all there if you learn to more or less let the content of the sentences play the second violin only. And if you don't make the mistake of mixing up sentences and reality, and if you use your eyes and ears, then you see that everyone

expresses himself in one way or another. If you have eyes and ears, the world is open. Nobody can have any secrets because the neurotic only fools himself, nobody else—except for awhile, maybe, if he is a good actor.

In most psychiatry, the sound of the voice is not noticed, only the verbal contact is abstracted from the total personality. Movements like—you see how much this young man here expresses in his leaning forward—the total personality as it expresses itself with movements, with posture, with sound, with pictures—there is so much invaluable material here, that we don't have to do anything else except get to the obvious, to the outermost surface, and feed this back, so as to bring this into the patient's awareness. *Feedback* was Carl Rogers' introduction into psychiatry. Again, he only mostly feeds back the sentences, but there is so much more to be fed back—something you might not be aware of, and here the attention and awareness of the therapist might be useful. So we have it rather easy compared with the psychoanalysts, because we see the whole being of a person right in front of us, and this is because Gestalt Therapy uses eyes and ears and the therapist stays absolutely in the now. He avoids interpretation, verbiage production, and all other types of mind-fucking. But mind-fucking is mind-fucking. It is also a symptom which might cover something else. But what is there is there. Gestalt Therapy is being in touch with the obvious.