

## Contacting Process

Contact with anything not novel - not different - does not require adjustment because the familiar, by definition, has been adjusted to (either by integration or rejection).

## The Novel

Contact with anything not novel - not different - does not require adjustment because the familiar, by definition, has been adjusted to (either by integration or rejection). What is pervasive is not an object of contact, ie, not assimilable. Essentially, what is not different is not contacted. Therefore what is assimilated is always novel;

Contact is dynamic, is the awareness of, and behaviour toward, the assimilable . . (Perls et al, 1951 p230). Therefore what is assimilated is always novel; and primarily, contact is the awareness of, and behaviour toward, the assimilable novelty (ibid, p230). What is pervasive is not an object of contact, ie, not assimilable. Essentially, what is not different is not contacted. Contact is dynamic and Goodman, in Perls et al (1951) says all contact is creative and dynamic (p230)

Perls et al 1951	Novelty	P230	Primarily, contact is the awareness of, and behaviour toward, the assimilable novelty; and the rejection of the inassimilable novelty
Perls et al 1951	Novelty	P230	All contact is creative and dynamic . . . because it must cope with the novel . . . cannot passively accept or <i>merely</i> adjust to the novel, because the novel must be assimilated
Perls et al 1951	Novelty	P230	what is assimilated is always novel
Perls et al 1951	Novelty	P373	... materials and energy of growth are: the conservative attempt of the organism to remain as it has been, the novel environment, the destruction of previous partial equilibria, and the assimilation of something new.

Perls et al 1951	Novelty	P230	What the organism perceives as the same or indifferent is not contacted, nor contactable
Philippson 2001	Novelty	P048	Novelty is an essential aspect of awareness, and novelty inevitably involves time (this is now, but wasn't then).

## Contact

Contact is dynamic, "... is the awareness of, and behaviour toward, the assimilable ...".  
(Perls et al, 1951 p230).

CONTACT may be shown:  $C=f(A+B)n$

Contact is a function of (varies with) the **A**wareness and **B**ehaviour towards the **n**ovel

Contact with anything not novel - not different - does not require attention because the familiar, by definition, has been attended and adjusted to (either by integration or rejection).

Another way of saying this is that an object of attention that is persistent and familiar is not an object of contact, ie, not assimilable. Therefore what is assimilated is always novel; and "primarily, contact is the awareness of, and behaviour toward, the assimilable novelty" (Perls et al 1951 p230). Essentially, what is not different is not contacted.

Mackewn notes that the self is an elusive and controversial concept. (Mackewn 1997 p73)

Rather than me/self being a structure, e.g., composed of id ego and super ego, Perls et al, the founders of Gestalt view Self as a process, and most importantly consider Self to be "the system of contacts at any moment". (Perls et al., 1951 p235)

"the self (is) the function of contacting the actual transient present". (Perls et al, 1951 p371)

This gives:  $S=f(C)t$

**S** is Self, **t** is the transient present (the now moment of time); and **C** is Contact.

The **Self** varies with the **Contact** in the actual transient present

What is being said here is that with Self being the system of contacts, the process of Self shows itself in Contact; Self is visible; is seen.



## Growth

Perls states "An organism preserves itself by growing". (Perls et al, 1951 p372)

Growth and preservation are a continuum; "self preserving and growing are polar". (Perls et al, 1951 p372)



So there is a balance with more preserving, less growth; and less preserving, more growth. This fits with the personality manifesting the enduring qualities; and does not deny the potential for change.

This fitting with Beisser's (1970) paradoxical theory of change that says, succinctly "that change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not".

So, the Self lives, and survives, in Contact; by

- making meaning,
- identifying
- and accepting or rejecting and alienating with
- all that it is not-self.

In noticing what presents as different the Self responds with assimilation or rejection, thus maintaining, and making, the self through this contact. This growth is the Self in contact in the moment and in this temporal sense then,

### **Creative and Dynamic**

Contact is dynamic and Goodman, in Perls 1951 says “all contact is creative and dynamic” (p230) Remembering this is Gestalt Contact and Gestalt Contact is Self, thus:

Self is creative and dynamic. As Wheeler puts it, we are hard-wired to be creative.

### **The Contact-Boundary**

The contact boundary ... is essentially *the organ of a particular relation of the organism and the environment* ... this particular relation is *growth*. Perls et al (1951 p229)

The contact boundary is not a physical separation, rather it is a quality of depth and permeability of the Self – Not-Self; of what is you – not you. It is as much the degree of spontaneity available for the situation.

THUS, the Contact Boundary is the organ of GROWTH (and this is relational – growth of organism/environment)

Growth is a function of the contact boundary:  $G = f(\beta)d$

where  $G =$  Growth,  $\beta =$  Contact Boundary,  $d =$  field

**G**rowth varies with Contact  $\beta$ oundary of the given field

The contact cycle between person and person your sense of the unitary interfunctioning of you and your environment (Perls et al 1951 p73) was first forward by Perls in 1947 as the cycle of the interdependency of organism and environment (Perls 1947 p43) and builds on the natural cycle of change and growth. (Clarkson and Mackewn 1993 p54) This cycle of contact provides for a fundamental cornerstone for appreciating how contact and its interruptions are viewed in Gestalt therapy.

In its original format Perls, prior to the writing of Excitement and Growth, laid out the cycle as shown below:

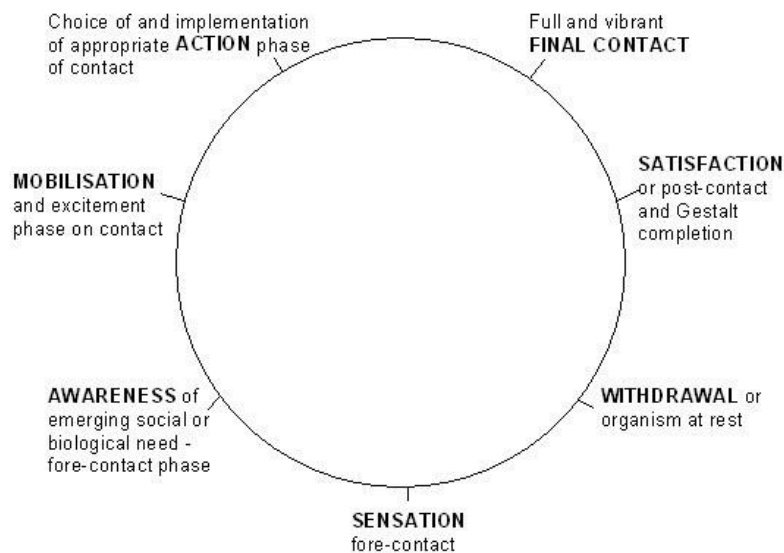
### **The Contact Event: Interfunctioning of You and Your Environment**

1. This is the original interfunctioning description given by Perls
2. The organism at rest.
3. The disturbing factor, which may be:
  - An external disturber - a demand made upon us, or any interference that puts us on the defensive
  - An internal disturbance - a need which has gathered enough momentum to strive for gratification and which requires:
4. The creation of an image or reality (plus-minus function and figure-background phenomena).
5. The answer to the situation aiming at:
6. A decrease of tension - achievement of gratification or compliance with the demands resulting in:
7. The return of the organism to balance

(Perls, 1947:1969, p. 43)

### **Cycle of Gestalt Formation and Destruction**

The contemporary model often cited is Clarkson (1989). This Cycle of Gestalt formation and destruction is usually referred to as the contact cycle, or Gestalt cycle.



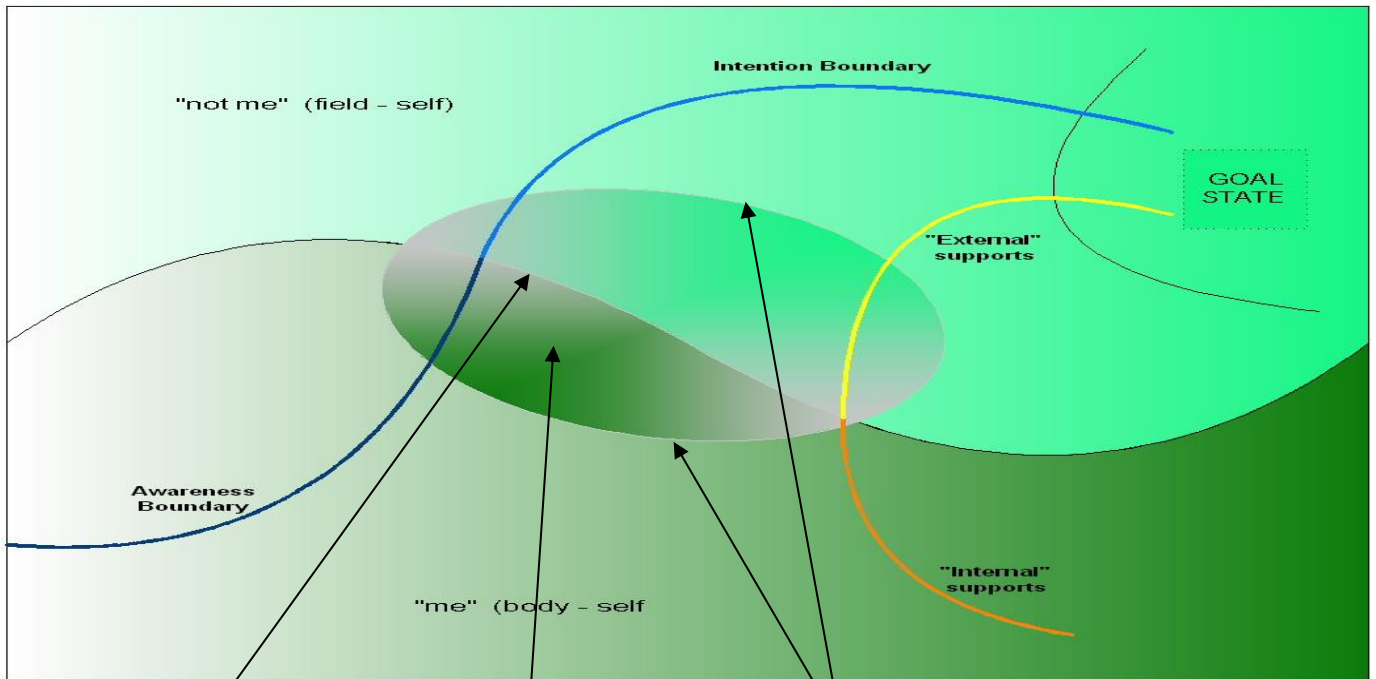
In sensing a difference the person is bringing the novel into figure, and into awareness. The resulting assimilation, or rejection, is a creative response by the person; and in this process there is an adjustment, through refining and reintegration of the self. This is creative adjustment. (Perls et al 1951 p230)

### **The Dynamic Interchanges of Self and Environment**

Wheeler (2003 pp163-178) suggests this (Clarkson / Zinker) simplistic model, and its usual accompaniment of biological needs being sensed and met, is insufficient in exploring deeply the nature of contact, and creativity, since unfortunately, little or nothing of [this] social relational ground of our being is evident (Wheeler, 2003, p. 163)

He takes the contact boundary and examines much more closely the dynamic interchanges of self and environment; moving into a much more experience-near position. (Wheeler, 2003, p. 166)

Wheeler has been able to provide the context of creativity in contact, and locate the zone for creativity in contact and contacting. This provides greater examination and locating the ingesting - whole or otherwise - across the contact boundary/zone



The boundary between me /not-me metamorphoses, swelling out from the boundary to create an experimental, third, zone of creativity, rehearsal, therapy, play, etc.

The metamorphosed boundary into the **experimental zone** is shown in the diagram by the ellipse. The permeability over this new, 'in-between' boundary 'externally' (from above) and/or 'internally' (from below) will provide for either catharsis or abuse experiences

This space, astride the originating boundary of 'me and not me' provides for 'safe emergency (Wheeler 2003) - it is in this zone, specifically, that therapy takes place. The 'me' side of the 'me-not me' boundary provides the client with the space for fantasy and imagination - for rehearsing and ingesting the therapy. Crossing over that originating boundary allows the client to experiment tangibly - in therapy for example, before moving out of the zone (the ellipse) and into real and external consequential world.

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