

BERND BOCIAN

**FRITZ PERLS IN BERLIN
1893–1933**

The translation of this book was made possible through the financial support of the German Association for Gestalt Therapy (Deutsche Vereinigung für Gestalttherapie e.V. - DVG) and the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT).

The Author

Bernd Bocian, PH.D. was born in 1954, and lives in Genoa, Italy. He works in private practice as well as in a Cooperativa Sociale. He is gestalt therapist, and was also trained in Reichian body work and psychoanalytic therapy. From 1985 to 2000 he was a member of the editorial board of the German journal *Gestalttherapie* (Ed. by DVG – Deutsche Vereinigung für Gestalttherapie – German Association for Gestalt therapy). He is author of various publications on the historical and contemporary relation between gestalt therapy and psychoanalysis (e.g. Bocian, B. / Staemmler, F.-M.: *Gestalttherapie und Psychoanalyse* 2000).

The Translator

Philip Schmitz was born in Princeton, New Jersey, and spent his formative decades in Salzburg. He earned an Austrian »Matura,« holds an MA in German, and established his credentials with translations of works by Wilhelm Reich. His first published translation appeared in 1975. He is a member of the PEN American Center and the American Council on Germany and lives in Connecticut.

Bernd Bocian

FRITZ PERLS IN BERLIN 1893–1933

Expressionism – Psychoanalysis – Judaism

Translated from the German by Philip Schmitz

© 2010 EHP - Verlag Andreas Kohlhage, Bergisch Gladbach

www.ehp.biz

© for the German edition Peter Hammer Verlag GmbH, Wuppertal 2007

Translated from the German by Philip Schmitz

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Cover Design: Gerd Struwe, Uwe Giese

– using a privately owned photography: ›Friedrich Solomon Perls 1923‹ –

Typeset by MarktTransparenz Uwe Giese, Berlin

Gedruckt in der EU

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN 978-3-89797-068-7

Contents

Deutsche Vereinigung für Gestalttherapie: Greeting	11
European Association for Gestalt Therapy: Greeting	13
Preface to the English Edition	15
Preface and Acknowledgements (from the First German Edition)	17
THE WORK OF REMEMBERING AND TOPICALITY	21
I. BIOGRAPHICAL COMPONENTS	29
1. Formative Life Contexts. War – Expressionism – Psychoanalysis	29
2. The Jewish Context and the Educational Ideal of Classical Humanism	32
2.1 Jews in the German Empire. Between Antisemitism and German-Jewish Cultural Chauvinism	33
2.2 Bourgeois Humanism Turns into Nationalism	37
2.3 The Humanistic Educational Ideal. Individuality and Holistic Personality Development	41
2.3.1 Friedrich Schiller. The »Middle Mode« and »Living Gestalt«	42
3. Early Influences	43
3.1 A Family from the Eastern Reaches of the German Empire	43
3.2 The Perls Family. »Creeping up the Middle-Class Ladder«	46
3.3 Childhood. Father Conflict and Rebellion	48
3.3.1 »The Emperor has no Clothes.«	52
3.4 Experiences in School. The Subservient Mentality and Unsuccessful Triangulation	53
3.4.1 The Winners in Modernization. Concerning the Level of Jewish Education	53
3.4.2 Cruel Teachers and an Absent Father	57
3.5 Perls's Father. An Irregular Free Mason	61
3.5.1 »The Order of Humanists« and the Peculiarity of Life in Nathan Perls's Lodges	62
3.5.2 Grand Master Nathan Perls. Revisionist and Nonconformist	65
3.6 Experiences in the Theater. The Search for Emotional Truth	66
3.6.1 A Mother Who Loved Art	67
3.6.2 Max Reinhardt	67
3.6.3 Perls the Actor. Revealing False Poses	70
3.7 Sexuality. Freud and Kohut	73
3.7.1 Sexual Need and Hunger for Life	73

3.7.2	Perls's »Sexual Problem« and Self Psychology	75
3.8	Medical Studies	78
4.	War, Trauma, and Revolution	80
4.1	War and the Cultural Avant-Garde	82
4.2	Working for the Red Cross and the Initial Shock of War	85
4.3	The Front Line, Gas Warfare, Death. Field Theory as an Experience	87
4.4	The »Jewish Census« and the German-Jewish Patriots	91
4.5	Bohemian Berlin. Injury and Opposition	94
4.6	The Trauma of War	96
4.7	Revolution and Murder Continue	100
4.7.1	The Civil War of 1918/1919 in Berlin	102
4.7.2	Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht are Murdered. The Bohemian Scene Radicalizes Itself	104
4.8	Perls in »Peaceful Freiburg« and the Counter-Revolution in Munich	106
4.9	Gustav Landauer's Liberal Socialism	109
5.	The Artistic Avant-Garde in Berlin and the Expressionist Weltanschauung	112
5.1	Perls in the Bohemian Circle Surrounding Salomo Friedlaender/Mynona	115
5.2	Ego Dissociation and the Renewal of Humanity	118
5.3	Hannah Höch. The Simultaneity of Perception. Constructivism	121
5.4	A Precious Figure against a Nihilistic Ground	122
5.5	Friedlaender/Mynona's Approach. Nietzsche, Polarism, the Middle Point	123
5.6	The Dadaistic Revolt and the Gestalt Dada	128
5.6.1	Fritz Perls – »Gestalt Dada«	131
5.7	Raoul Hausmann. »Philosopher of Dada« and Polarity Theoretician	134
5.8	Otto Gross. Anarchism and Psychoanalysis	136
5.8.1	Gross and Hausmann. Revolting against One's Own Conventions	138
5.8.2	Cultural-Revolutionary Psychoanalysis. One's Own Authority as Opposed to the Authority of the Other	140
5.8.3	The Need for Contact. Loneliness or Submission	142
6.	The Years of the Weimar Republic	145
6.1	The Early Crisis Years. Anti-Semitism and Inflation	145
6.2	The »Golden Twenties.« Americanism and the Coldness Metaphor	148
6.3	Psychoanalysis. Initial Contacts	153
6.3.1	Sigmund Freud as the Saviour	153

6.3.2	Karen Horney. Human Involvement and Hopes of Growth	157
6.4	Frankfurt. The Gestalt Concept or, Thinking in Terms of Context and Relationships	160
6.4.1	Goldstein, Lewin and the Unconscious	161
6.4.2	An Integrative Atmosphere	164
6.4.3	Psychoanalysis and Gestalt Psychology	166
6.5	Intermezzo at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute	169
6.5.1	Attending Wilhelm Reich's »Technical Seminar.« Resistance and Character Analysis	173
6.5.2	Orgasm and the Genital Character	178
6.6	A New Beginning in Berlin. Medicine and Psychoanalysis	180
6.6.1	Working as a Physician	180
6.6.2	Learning and Suffering at the Psychoanalytic Institute	182
6.7	The Bauhaus Concept	186
6.8	Political Polarization, Dialectics, and Alienation	189
6.8.1	Perls Attempts to Take a Class Position	191
6.8.2	Georg Lukács. Hegel, Dialectics and the Contextual Method	194
7.	The Concept of Totality	198
7.1	Totality on the Left and on the Right	198
7.2	The Transitional Gestalt and the Figure of Tension	199
7.3	The Individualism of Lebensphilosophie	201
8.	At the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. 1930–1933	204
8.1	Siegfried Bernfeld. The Gestalt Experience and »Social Place«	206
8.2	Wilhelm Reich. Politics and the Continuing Development of Active Technique	208
8.2.1	Neocatharsis and Physical Resistance. From Ferenczi to Fenichel and Reich	210
8.2.2	Masochism and Politics. Bernfeld and Freud against Reich	213
9.	Hunger, Chewing, Growing. Intellectual Approaches of One's Own in Opposition to the Power of Psychoanalytic Interpretation and the German Tradition of Obedience	215
9.1	Ernst Bloch. The Hunger Drive, Self-Extension, and the Dawning of the New	217
10.	Trauma Therapy and Figures of Steel	220
10.1	The Trauma of War and »Acting Out« Therapy	221
10.2	Armored Men. Men of Steel	225
11.	Perls's Lessons from the End of the Weimar Republic	229
11.1	Dr. Perls and the »Marxist Workers' School« (MASCH)	230
11.2	Left Freudians	231

11.3	Splitting instead of Integration. The Failure of the »Anti-Fascist Action«	235
11.4	The Marginalization of Wilhelm Reich	237
11.5	Endangerment and Escape	240
11.5.1	Confluence and Projections Can Cost Lives	244
12.	Exodus and Death	246
12.1	The Fate of the Perls Family in Berlin	248

II. THE EXPERIENCES OF THE GERMAN-JEWISH AVANT-GARDE. THEIR TOPICALITY TODAY **249**

1.	German-Jewish Experiences	249
1.1	Kafka's Four-Legged Beings	250
1.2	Universalism, Loneliness, Modernity	251
1.3	Gestalt Assimilation Theory. A Biological-Sociological Resistance Metaphor	253
2.	Autonomy instead of Auschwitz: Confluence Kills	255
3.	Perls's Topicality: Identity Work	259
3.1	Nietzsche and the Artists	260
3.2	The Multiplicity of the Subject	262
3.3	Kafka and Perls. »But« versus »And«	263
4.	Mephistopheles As a Ferment for Integration. Perls's Leitmotiv	264
4.1	There Is No End to Integration	264
4.2	Mephistopheles. Disturbing and Complementing	266
5.	Conclusion. Expressionists, Émigrés, and Those in Search of a Homeland	267

Annotations	269
--------------------	------------

APPENDIX **295**

Institutions and Archives Consulted	295
--	------------

References	295
-------------------	------------

Index	312
--------------	------------

Dedicated to the memory
of my beloved wife Gabriella Barisione
(May 13, 1958 – November 26, 2008)
and to our daughter Mirta

Deutsche Vereinigung für Gestalttherapie: Greeting

This volume is dedicated to Fritz Perls's impact on Gestalt therapy. In its breadth and depth, the account reveals the multifaceted background and its significance for Perls's life and the development of Gestalt therapy.

The roots of Gestalt therapy lie in the Germany of the 1920th. After Fritz and Laura Perls were forced to flee Nazi Germany they had to plant and nurture these roots on different soil.

Bernd Bocian's well-informed elucidation exemplifies the variation and breadth of the cultural, political and historical embedment. The later development of Gestalt therapy is based on what he describes so thoroughly, so vividly and with such versatility.

The pleasure of reading this differentiated and colorful account should not be limited to German readers, and the DVG-Board wholeheartedly supports the publication of an English edition of this book.

We are particularly pleased that the story of Fritz Perls's life in Berlin is ready to be presented at the 10th European Gestalt Conference in Berlin!

Berlin, July 2010

Veronica Klingemann and Judith Wurm-Beissel

for the board of the German Association for Gestalt Therapy

(Deutsche Vereinigung für Gestalttherapie e.V. - DVG)

European Association for Gestalt Therapy: Greeting

When I read this book for the first time in German, I realized that it was an important work and should also be made available in English.

Many professionals hold the opinion that Gestalt therapy originated in the USA with the publication of »Gestalt Therapy« (Perls, Hefferline, Goodman, 1951) – or possibly with the publication of »Ego, Hunger and Aggression« (Perls, 1947) which was written in South Africa, developed by Laura and Fritz Perls out of psychoanalysis, and in that sense paved the way for Perls's new therapeutic approach. But Fritz Perls had previously spent 40 years of his life in Germany and had received his education in Berlin, the city of his birth. Drawing on our knowledge of field influences, we can easily imagine what an enormous impact the cultural environment of this era must have had on him (and on Laura Perls) as well as on the later conception of Gestalt therapy.

For several years, there has been an interest within the international Gestalt community in rediscovering and reflecting on Gestalt therapy's European roots. Bernd Bocian has not merely made a further contribution to the biography of Fritz Perls. His detailed descriptions of the historical, cultural, and political events of those years provide more. This book also sheds an interesting historical light on the realities of living in Berlin during the four decades spanning the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, World War I, and the period between the world war and the rise of Nazi fascism.

Although Fritz Perls represents the figure in this story, the book concentrates on his surroundings and the age in which he lived, on the impact of its culture and politics, on the very specific life that German Jews led in Berlin, and on their integration into Germany. For many of them, being a German represented a more pregnant figure than the figure of being Jewish. Many of them considered themselves Jewish Germans, and not German Jews. It was all the more shocking for them when they realized that from the perspective of Nazi ideology they were pregnant in a different sense: the Nazis viewed them as German Jews and proceeded to declare war against Judaism. Many Jewish Germans could not understand how it was possible for such a change to occur and simply did not believe it, until it was too late to escape.

Culturally and politically interested readers, psychoanalysts, and, of course, Gestalt therapists will discover a multitude of fascinating new aspects of this era. The author impressively illustrates the influence of Fritz Perls's life on his later conception of Gestalt therapy. Readers will see how right-wing and left-wing politicians adopted a holistic viewpoint for ideological purposes. Perls's emphasis on autonomy that supports social action rather than on becoming confluent with »the whole,« that is, with the »greater idea« or the »higher ge-

stalt,« was very much influenced by his biographical experiences during the age of German fascism. This experience made a positive contribution to his later orientation. It led to his decision to leave South Africa as fascism (Apartheid) emerged there, as well as his decision to leave the USA at a time when fascist tendencies were on the ascendant and Richard Nixon was elected president. Perls disagreed with Maslow, who transformed humanistic psychology into transpersonal psychology exactly at the time when a political shift toward fascism was taking place in America.

The political dimension of Fritz Perls's approach is still very topical today. Since Gestalt therapy is often combined with esoteric elements, a more in-depth discussion should take place with respect to the two different kinds of holistic thinking, namely, that seen in Perls's concept of Gestalt therapy and the other as conceived by transpersonal psychology and the esoteric schools. Such combinations of Gestalt therapy and esotericism raise a question: to what extent is the view of man espoused by a rational, emancipatory psychotherapy compatible with a regressive, esoteric-evolutionary approach, or are these views of man contradictory and therefore incompatible?

We must be careful about what we integrate into Gestalt therapy as it was intended by Fritz and Laura Perls and Paul Goodman. And if we do not wish to reverse the core of Gestalt therapy into its opposite, we must be mindful of when the limits have been reached for what can be integrated from the esoteric, transpersonal world.

I would like to thank Bernd Bocian for his valuable book and Philip Schmitz for his careful translation. My thanks as well to the German Association for Gestalt Therapy (DVG) and the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT) for supporting the translation financially. And, of course, I would also like to acknowledge publisher Andreas Kohlhaage for his courage to publish in English.

Zurich, July 29, 2010

Peter Schulthess

President, European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT)

Preface to the English Edition

Using Fritz Perls as an example, this book recalls the representatives of an urban avant-garde culture who were driven out of Europe, emigrated, and for the most part found a new homeland in the USA. Many an element of the lost avant-garde spirit later found its way back to Europe in an enriched form. For me, Gestalt therapy belongs in this category. This monograph is the first to focus in greater depth on the German-European roots of Gestalt therapy. It thereby bridges the continents at the same time. Hopefully, this will contribute to overcoming amnesia in both Europe and America and focus attention on an intellectual continuity which, from my perspective, has not been sufficiently recognized to date.

I have concentrated primarily on the background, that is, the experiential world in which Perls moved, and therefore also on the diverse intellectual currents that left their mark on his life, thinking, and actions. It is only this perspective that provides meaning for the ultimately scarce direct biographical data from and about the period which, after all, comprised the first 40 years of his life. Fritz Perls's work style was not that of a theoretician whose interest lies in documenting the sources and development of the thoughts he deems important in order to render them comprehensible. My intention was to demonstrate how basic principles of Gestalt therapy emerged from the theories, artistic ideas, political crises, and social psychological atmosphere prevailing at the beginning of the 20th century. If I have succeeded, in shedding light on the many kinds of influence that impinged on Perls during his years in Berlin and their importance for his later development, the effect could be twofold. We will be in a position to expand a restricted, »figure-centered« view of Perls, and, against this more comprehensive background, the richness of what later manifested as Gestalt therapy will be perceived with even greater clarity and differentiation. In his review¹ of the German edition, my colleague, Detlef Klöckner, observed that reading the book made him feel »more fully ensconced in Gestalt therapy than before, and something akin to ›historically complemented‹ as well.« Conducting the research for the book had exactly the same effect on me, and I would be delighted if other colleagues were to have the same experience.

As a European and especially as a German Gestalt therapist, there was an additional matter of particular importance that I formulated trenchantly in the chapter heading »Autonomy instead of Auschwitz.« Against the backdrop of two world wars and the experience of fascism and National Socialism, Fritz Perls's sometimes unbalanced inclination toward individuality and autonomy, and his fundamentally anti-confluent posture, cannot simply be dismissed as

a personal problem. I hope deeply that the present work will make it clearer that there is a historical lesson to be learned from the survival experiences of the so-called »Expressionist generation« to which Fritz Perls belonged. The idea is to sharpen the vigilance of the individual, to strengthen people's ability to make decisions and, if necessary, also to resist when the community, the crowd, or the greater whole either entice them or demand that they surrender themselves. Although we fully realize that Gestalt therapy was conceived as a relational approach from the very outset, and that this aspect remains one of its strengths to this day, keeping these experiences alive is part of our European legacy. In my view, this numbers among the unrelinquishable treasures of our approach.

For the realization of this translation project, I am indebted to the Executive Committee of the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT), in particular its president Peter Schulthess, and to the trustees of the German Association for Gestalt Therapy (DVG), in particular Christof Weber who provided the initial impulse. Naturally, the project would have been equally unthinkable without the interest of publisher Andreas Kohlhage (EHP) and the competence and open communication style of the translator, Philip Schmitz, to whom we are indebted for the translation of Wilhelm Reich's »Early Writings,« and who concurrently assumed the task of editing parts of the German manuscript.

I would also like to acknowledge the following individuals for the wide range of support and concrete assistance they provided as I prepared the English edition. They are listed here in the »order of their appearance«: Zvi Lothane, New York; Nancy Amendt-Lyon, Vienna; Dan Bloom, New York; and Frank Staemmler, Würzburg.

Bernd Bocian

Genoa, May 2010

Preface and Acknowledgements (from the First German Edition)

This book is not only the first biographical study of the forty years Friedrich Salomon (»Fritz«) Perls spent in Berlin, and therewith also a book about the pre-history of Gestalt Therapy, it also simultaneously incorporates part of the history of the so-called »Expressionist generation.« The formative years in the lives of these social outsiders and pioneers of modernity began with the trauma of the First World War and extended to the era of the Weimar Republic and their emigration from Nazi Germany. Perls's life exemplifies the suffering that was typical for this generation and brings its enormous creativity to light.

Furthermore, in describing Perls's years in Berlin I am providing a missing piece in the mosaic of the social and intellectual history of the *psychoanalytic movement*. Perls came from the left wing of the Berlin Institute and as a psychoanalyst numbered among the »nonconformists, heretics, and truth seekers who were prepared to take risks« (Dahmer 1995). Until the end of his life, he remained a creative, inconvenient, and independent-minded thinker. Perls represented a species that was mourned not only by Anna Freud after its members emigrated and vanished from psychoanalytic organizations. For a deep understanding of Perls as an individual and of the historical context to be discussed here, I also consider it indispensable to know the social and psychological phenomena implied by the concept and mode of experience of a »German Jew.« German Jews made significant contributions to the Expressionist movement, both personally and in terms of content, and it was almost entirely they who carried the psychoanalytic movement. In addition to that, Perls's central theoretical positions, such as his positive evaluation of autonomy and his critical attitude toward confluence phenomena, can only be understood against this background.

The years Perls spent in Berlin and which we will portray here reflect the fascinating and ultimately tragic history of an *avant-garde, European-oriented urban culture*. Beginning in 1933, the protagonists of this culture either fled from Europe and Germany, were expelled, or killed. Fritz Perls and his wife Lore managed to escape the destruction of this culture and its representatives, and they were able to integrate into their own therapeutic approach, and thereby preserve, many of the protagonists' life and survival experiences that have lasting value for the future. As a European and in particular as a German Gestalt therapist, I felt that using Fritz Perls as an example to remember this culture, the emigrants, and the individuals was an inner obligation. It was also a matter that was close to my heart.

I would like to express my thanks to Erhard and Anke Doubrawa and to Hammer Verlag for the opportunity to make this monograph accessible to an

interested public. Further, I would like to thank Hartmut Frech and Regine Reichwein for giving me the opportunity to submit an initial version of this study as a doctoral dissertation at the Technical University of Berlin. The present edition has been substantially expanded and revised, and I have added footnotes containing important information and explanations.

I would like to express special thanks to the individuals listed below who provided concrete assistance during my years of investigation and research, among them in particular the many psychoanalytic colleagues who supported me with unexpected openness and generosity as if it were a matter of course.

And finally, my thanks to my Italian wife Gabriella and my little daughter Mirta who in part grew up along with this book.

Bernd Bocian

Genoa, September 2006

Following are those who helped me to find and obtain biographical material and documents pertaining to the history of the times:

Mitchell G. Ash, Berlin/Vienna
Andreas Bocian, Münster
Gerhard Brändle, Pforzheim
Ms. Bruckmann, Berlin
Dieter Essig, Pforzheim
Ernst Federn, Vienna
Hildegard Feidel-Mertz, Frankfurt
Volker Friedrich, Hamburg
Rainer Funk, Tübingen
Birgit Gregor-Jerke, Berlin
Sabine Hank, Berlin
Ludger M. Herrmanns, Berlin
Michael Hubensdorf, Berlin/Toronto
Alfred Hübner, Pforzheim
Dagmar Kicherer, Freiburg
Helga Krohn, Frankfurt
Michael Laier, Frankfurt
Hans-Friedrich Lockemann, Berlin
Regine Lockot, Berlin
Kurt Mühlberger, Vienna
Thomas Müller, Berlin
Bernd Nitzschke, Düsseldorf
Johannes Reichmayr, Vienna
Hans J. Rothe, Frankfurt
Channa Schütz, Berlin
Milan Sreckovic, Nice
Anna Sreckovic, Nice
Albrecht Goetz von Olenhusen, Freiburg

THE WORK OF REMEMBERING AND TOPICALITY

Our history is the background of
our existence, it is not an accumulation
of facts but the record of how we become
what we are. (Fritz Perls 1973, 76)¹

The only remembering that is fertile
is that which simultaneously reminds us
of what remains to be done. (Ernst Bloch 1985, 516)

Fritz Perls, generally considered the founder of Gestalt therapy, achieved fame as a kind of counter-cultural guru on the American West Coast in the late sixties of the last century. Transcending the conventions of established psychotherapy during his times, and definitely those of Freudian psychoanalysis, he undertook daring existential encounters with his group clientele. His direct style of communication brought about healing, caused harm, and most certainly expanded the spectrum of therapeutic intervention. Hardly anyone viewed his appearance as a figure against the background of a life that had already spanned more than 70 years. The person who does will discover that many a formulation with a seemingly superficial ring and many a hardly explained theoretical or practical approach drew upon a life that was steeped in the experience of survival and had assimilated copious amounts of theory.

Behind the »dirty old man,« as Perls often referred to himself, whose external appearance during the last years of his life presented a mixture of Rabbi, Santa Claus, and Rasputin, with a bushy full beard and bib overalls, and whose funeral in San Francisco in 1971 would have done great credit to a hippie king, behind this lies the life of Friedrich Salomon Perls who was born into a Jewish family in Berlin in 1893.

Perls trained as a neurologist at major medical institutions and as a Freudian psychoanalyst in Berlin and Vienna, the most important international centers of the discipline in his day. He worked as a training analyst for several years with the official recognition of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) and must be considered an experienced clinician. Behind the popular image of the eccentric from the American West Coast, there is a man who stood as a lifelong representative of the so-called Expressionist generation. He »grew up« on the bohemian scene in Berlin, participated in Expressionism and Dadaism, and experienced the turning of the artistic avant-garde toward the revolutionary left. Deployment to the front line, the trauma of war, anti-Semitism, intimidation, escape, and the Holocaust are further key

sources of biographical influence. The »detailed study of a life that was slashed by two world wars and emigration, and a mind that was moved by all of the streams typical for the era,«² instilled me with a substantial degree of respect for the old man's life experience and the approach that he inspired.

For me, central positions, theories, and methods of Gestalt therapy are part of the tradition of the *European-oriented cultural avant-garde in Berlin*³ during the years of the Weimar Republic. They were later driven out by the Nazis, and what fled Germany in 1933 along with Fritz⁴ Perls were essentially the experiences of the so-called Expressionist generation. Moreover, the history of the development of the Gestalt approach as a therapeutic method is part of psychoanalytic history in the German cultural region, in particular the history of Freudian psychoanalysis in exile. For historians of psychoanalysis, Perls does not exist as a candidate at the Berlin Institute, nor is the fact recognized that for some time he held an official position as an IPA training analyst in South Africa. The present book fills a gap in the pre-Nazi history of psychoanalysis in that respect. It is my intention to examine the first years of Perls's emigration in a further monograph and also in that context to research the reasons for the withdrawal of his accreditation as a training analyst.

Elsewhere, I have analyzed in detail the course of Gestalt therapy's evolution from the revision of Freud's theory, methods, and critique of culture (see Bocian 2000). The revision of orthodox positions that was begun by Fritz and Lore Perls as a psychoanalytic couple, and carried forward together with Paul Goodman, looks back on a line of ancestors composed overwhelmingly of dissidents from the Freudian school.⁵ One of the main objectives Perls and Goodman pursued in their foundational work, »Gestalt Therapy,« was to understand and integrate as complementary polarities⁶ diverse innovations within psychoanalysis. The innovations concentrated on certain areas of human reality which they considered valuable but had been driven into dissidence by the orthodox mainstream at the time (see Perls et al. 1996, 236f., Stoehr 1994, 300f.).

Since psychoanalysis, as Perls once remarked, is a »research project« (Perls 1977, 142) and, »as a science of the human being cannot be monopolized« (Cremerius 1992, 34), Gestalt therapy for me remains a figure against the ground of psychoanalytic history, theory formation, and practice. It is characterized in particular by the preservation and continuance of radical elements in Freudian psychoanalysis, by which I am referring to its relational, contextual, and socially critical aspects (see Bocian 2000, 98 f., Lichtenberg 2005, Lothane 1997).

Accordingly, in the context of the present monograph I will also point out the origins of the culturally critical line of tradition within psychoanalysis which made its influence felt in the Expressionist milieu through Otto Gross. In my opinion, Gestalt therapy is also part of this tradition.

With reference to the fact that Perls was an emigrant, I share the opinion expressed by Uwe Peters in his book »Psychiatrie im Exil« (Psychiatry in Exile), namely, that the emigrants are little remembered. In keeping with Peters, the present book also makes an effort to »do a small part of the necessary mourning work, to contribute a tiny piece toward a *saveur diachronique* and thereby to counteract somewhat the emigrants' lamented, traceless disappearance from German history« (Peters 1992, 397).

Using Fritz Perls as an example, I will also recall to mind the lasting value of specific *life experiences of German Jews*, thereby also remembering a constituent part of German culture that appears to have been routed, destroyed, and irrecoverably lost. It is important in this context to note that it was the very members of the Berlin cultural avant-garde, and even more decidedly the German Jews among them, who viewed themselves as embedded in a bourgeois-humanistic *European* culture, which they also legitimized through their direct personal and professional international contacts during the years of the Weimar Republic.

In regarding and designating Perls as a German Jew, a label I will later justify and discuss, it is my intention here to describe the individuals involved not merely as objects and victims, but also to portray them in Rürup's sense as »individuals who actively participated in and contributed to the shaping of German history« (Rürup in Bundeszentrale 1991, 59). Rürup calls the history of German-Jewish relations a »grand and in some respects unique history that came to an abrupt and terrible end and was so thoroughly destroyed that even its traces in history have been blurred« (ibid.). Robert B. Goldmann, a »pre-war Jew« (Goldmann 1999, 10) living in New York, took a similar stance in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* after the death of Ignaz Bubis, Chairman of the Central Committee for Jews in Germany. Goldmann argues that in America almost the only part of the history of European Jews, and thereby generally also of Jews in the German-speaking countries, for which there is any awareness, entails their flight, expulsion, and murder. Against that background, he makes a case for »an educational system where the history of German-speaking Jews in Central Europe is a key theme« (ibid.). Rürup and Goldmann, as well as Hermand (1996) and Mosse⁷ would like to prevent the creative life of Jews over the course of German history from fading into oblivion. In my opinion, the development of Gestalt therapy presents itself as a good example of this because something of the humanistic European spirit and the personal boundary experiences and survival strategies of those who represented this culture lives on within it.

Nevertheless, it is only possible to speak of German-Jewish culture in unilateral terms, that is, with respect to the majority of Jews living in Germany at the time, and appellations such as »the grand and unique history of a relation-

ship« must be seen in a relative light. There was practically no interest on the German side in an encounter or a dialogue with Judaism. The Jews who had assimilated themselves into German society and culture turned their Jewishness into a denomination, like the Catholics or Protestants. Ever since their legal emancipation, Jews possessed civil rights, and their assimilation made them members of German society who saw themselves as German citizens of the Jewish or Mosaic faith. Traverso has again pointed out most vehemently that emancipation did in fact dismantle the separate and separatist Jewish »nation,« but because of Germany's differentiation between national and ethnic identity this for the most part voluntary renunciation was not followed by the acquisition of German ethnicity (Deutschtum) even if a percentage of the assimilated Jews subjectively believed that to be the case. »Whether they realized it or not, assimilated Jews lived in a kind of no-man's land« (Traverso 1993, 9). The widely discussed and controversial German-Jewish symbiosis only applied to a numerically small although influential group of outsiders, in which national, social, or religious origin played no role (see Gay 1979, Hermand 1996, Mosse 1992, Scholem 1995, Traverso 1993). For me, Perls belonged to this group of often nonconformist individuals, whose view of the world against the backdrop of the European Enlightenment was shaped by *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life), whose experience of life qualified them as members of the Expressionist generation, and who adopted left-liberal to extreme left-wing orientations no later than the German November Revolution of 1918. During the years of the Weimar Republic, that »republic of outsiders« (Gay 1989a), the avant-garde culture these individuals created became influential – although not dominant – and was crowned with success until its protagonists were expelled and sent fleeing, while outside of Germany the cultural myth of the Weimar Republic arose and particularly that of Berlin during »the wild twenties.« The basic fabric of Gestalt therapy, in my opinion, is woven from the intellectual and cultural material of these years; the development of Gestalt therapy through Fritz and Lore Perls preserved many an element of this culture by removing it to safety in the world beyond Germany's borders.

The so-called Expressionist generation, those social outsiders and *pioneers of modernity*, were the individuals who experienced most consciously and suffered most intensely under the modernization process that was rapidly taking hold in Germany, particularly in the metropolis of Berlin. From their advanced posts, they were attempting to cope then with what today's social diagnosticians of that era⁸ are calling an opportunity and a danger for individual identity formation in postmodern or globalized industrial nations. By this I mean phenomena such as the plurality of meanings and interpretations of the world, and also the dissolution of the traditional social and family ties

that provide individuals the space potentially to shape their lives on their own terms, while at the same time subjecting them to the constraints and risks of constructing a self based on their own personal responsibility. During that age, only a small group of individuals was affected, namely, the avant-garde. Today, such »risky freedoms« (Beck 1986) confront an increasingly large part of the population. Against this background, the concept of Gestalt therapy presents itself in my view as an attempt to respond to the threats and opportunities raised by an ongoing process of social-psychological change that has encompassed ever larger segments of society since that time. Gestalt therapy carries within itself experiences that contain a utopia of wholeness as well as experience in dealing with disruption, dissociation, and threatened identity. It is an attempt undertaken by concrete individuals to respond to the general demands of modernity as well as its specifically German outgrowths.

In the following, I will review the history of the origins of Gestalt therapy, which is closely connected with the personal histories of Fritz and Lore Perls and the story of their emigration. Even if Fritz Perls, Lore Perls, and Paul Goodman, this »ménage à trois« to use the words of Lore Perls, must be viewed as the collective founders of Gestalt therapy, Fritz Perls still remains the »main intellectual initiator« (Frambach 1996, 44) in my eyes.⁹ Without Fritz Perls, Gestalt therapy would not have come into existence. In a certain sense, it was his »baby,« and he was also the one who made the baby known to the world. The picture cannot be complete without Lore Perls, but unfortunately a comprehensive examination of her life and thought has not yet been undertaken. However, Milan Sreckovic (1999) and Dan Bloom (2005) have elaborated the biographically and intellectually important core of such a project.

The time period examined in the present book spans more than half of Perls's life, and the first forty years of a human lifetime surely contain in more or less pronounced form all of the important factors influencing the development of a personality. Until now, no separate study of the German phase of Fritz Perls's life has been published, that is, none that exceeds the information contained in the books he or his wife published or provided during interviews.¹⁰ The biography by Shepard (1975) made no further contribution to the then known material on Perls's German period. That applies as well to the book by Clarkson und Mackewn (1995) which was published almost twenty years later. I am unable to confirm Shepard's comment that material on Perls's »formative years« (Shepard 1975, xc) in Germany was inaccessible because of the Shoah, among other reasons. Rather, it appears that until now no one has conducted research in the area, nor has anyone to date delved into the pre-history of Gestalt therapy within the context of that period in German history. The monograph by Gaines (1979) remains valuable because his extensive compilation of personal recollections of Perls has also preserved important biographical material.¹¹

With respect to the analysis of the figuration¹² of personal life experiences and theory production in Fritz Perls, the present study pursues a line of inquiry that Plöger's article on the methodological problems and perspectives of biographical research sums up very aptly, terminologically speaking, for our purposes, namely, »How did this Gestalt come into existence?« (Plöger in Dickow 1988, 94). In answering this question, I hew to the hermeneutic tradition and regard those concepts of the Gestalt approach which are represented specifically by Fritz Perls as practice that has become symbol, as life which has »coalesced« into texts. By analyzing existing sources and new material, I will attempt to elucidate and interpret his life within the historical context of its times. I will include the political, cultural, and intellectual factors that influenced it, as well as the subjective learning, adjustment, and processing mechanisms that came into play during its course. In keeping with Gestalt therapy's »contextual method« (Perls et al. 1996, 243 f.), I embed individual biographical memories within the life-environment that served as a backdrop and gives them meaning. To that end, I have drawn on previously unknown and unpublished biographical material from German and Austrian archives and libraries, as well as excerpts from the personal correspondence¹³ of Fritz and Lore Perls during the period.

The interpretation of biographies always remains open-ended. Yet by the same token, every time a life is looked at anew, previously unseen or even forgotten aspects emerge. My efforts to avoid a purely subjective interpretation of Perls's life were supported – apart from the analysis of the complex historical context of his life – by consulting the published memoirs of people who were his contemporaries and moved in a similar or, partially, even in the same milieu as he. Comparisons showed that similar life experiences led to conclusions pointing in the same direction.

In principle, I prefer an approach that follows Peter Gay's so-called »horizontal connections« (Gay 1979, 8), which he differentiates from the »vertical connections« in historical studies. In Gay's view, establishing vertical connections and using historical events »as clues of crimes to come« (ibid.) represents a legitimate method, for example, viewing historical events in Germany from the perspective of the horror of National Socialism. The horizontal perspective I favor in the present monograph concentrates on the actual experiences of the individuals. This method is closer to the »contextual method« typically seen in the Gestalt approach (Perls et al. 1996, 243 f.), that is, closer to what Perls and Goodman called »Gestalt analysis« (ibid. 232).¹⁴ In Gestalt psychology, the traditional assumption is that every subject's convictions correspond to the inner conditions prevailing during their experiences as well as those characterizing their field, and that reality is always created subjectively in the field of actual life. Accordingly, Gay emphasizes that the horizontal perspec-

tive focuses its attention on the then present of the individuals, which was »anything but a chamber of potential horrors. It was a blooming buzzing confusion alive with conflicts and uncertainties and gratification. Their present was what the present always is: bewildering, luxuriant in illegible, often contradictory clues« (Gay *ibid.*, 9 f.).

At this point, we cannot avoid mentioning that a researcher's perspective is always limited and affected by his subjective interests, among other things. The author of a biographical study hopes not only »to gain additional knowledge of the world, but also to increase his insight into himself« (Schwarze 1987, 11). Examining the life of another is arguably always »a process of gaining self-knowledge through the other person« (*ibid.*).¹⁵

I. BIOGRAPHICAL COMPONENTS

1. Formative Life Contexts. War – Expressionism – Psychoanalysis

Friedrich Salomon Perls was born in Berlin in the year 1893 as the third child and only son of a Jewish family from the Eastern part of the German Empire. This date and origin place him in a certain social and historical context. In answer to the question of which formative social influences Perls's generation assimilated, I would like to cite the following important spheres of influence – naturally, from a focused perspective based on my knowledge of the later course of his life.

- 1) Fritz Perls was a member of the so-called »front generation,« those born in the 80s and 90s of the 19th century. During their youth, these people experienced the euphoric upswing and anxiety about the future that was part of the years leading up to the First World War, and they numbered among the age group »that was most frequently posted to the front lines, spent the longest amount of time there, and were therefore a ›front generation‹ in a special sense« (Peukert 1987, 30). As a rule, it was only after completing their military service that these young men gathered experience with politics, started families, or launched their careers which were generally delayed until they returned home from the war (see Peukert *ibid.*).

Moreover, the experience of war surely allowed virtually none of the soldiers to return home without *traumatic experiences* from the bullet-riddled trenches that were glutted with corpses. But after the revolution and collapse of the emperor's ancient imperial world, »home« no longer consisted of the accustomed social order and its specific values. The majority of young men who served in the war and stemmed from middle class backgrounds reacted to the experience of war, the experience of defeat, their disappointed fantasies of grandeur, and the loss of time-honored social and human orientations by seeking and finding new support in right-wing »volkish«¹ ideologies. Perls's mode of reaction took a different course, with his socialization in the bohemian circles of Berlin playing a decisive role.

- 2) Many representatives of avant-garde culture in the Weimar Republic stemmed from the front generation. This movement of innovators created works of lasting effect along the sidelines of established institutions, and it was »a place where genuine alliance took place between Jews and Germans as they encountered one another on the terrain of a common revolt« (Traverso

1993, 53). The underlying influence was that of *Expressionism*, which was already exerting an effect during the days of the empire. As a designation of an epoch, it comprised the period from 1910 to 1925, at the latest (see Vietta 1994). The so-called Expressionist generation was »chaotically torn by its experience of destroyed tradition and lost identity« (Glaser 1976, 200). After the First World War, this part of the front generation regained its identity through revolt; it searched for the »new man« in a socialist »brotherhood« that lay beyond the patriarchal social order and the struggle against the patriarchal father, beyond the self-constraint mechanisms of the super-ego and a mentality of social subservience.

Here, I attach importance to the interpretational approach suggested by Vietta (1994) who attempted to grasp the manifold artistic styles and phenomena of the age by filtering out an inner cohesiveness. For Vietta, the hallmark of the Expressionist epoch is the *dialectic between the personal experience of ego-dissociation and the yearning for a renewal of humanity*, or, between the experience of alienation and the messianic call for individual transformation (see *ibid.*, 22). Seen in this light, the core of Expressionism is not the actual artistic act, but rather a specific experience of the self and the world.² As I will demonstrate, this experience can also be found in Perls who moved in the artistic and bohemian circles implied here during the years in question.

In this milieu, philosophy and epistemology were often not studied in the actual sense but rather assimilated through »osmosis« to a large extent and »existentially anticipated« (*ibid.*, 151). The philosophical foundation of the Expressionist groups (and indeed of all oppositional circles from left to right) was *Lebensphilosophie*, which was synonymous, particularly in its Nietzschean form, with an anti-bourgeois position and criticism of the Wilhelminian value system. This philosophical foundation will require our attention, as will the most succinct expression of the avant-garde movement with its anti-bourgeois self-image, to the extent it transpired within the field of lived art or philosophical action. Here, I am referring to *Dadaism in Berlin*, with which Perls was affiliated through Salomo Friedlaender/Mynona, his first »guru« (see Erlhof in Hausmann, 228; Exner 1996, 264 f.). Perls, who was truly a follower of Diogenes, a neo-kynic, in terms of Sloterdijk (1983b, 711 f.), was one of the few people to retain the spirit of Dada until the end of his life. For Raoul Hausmann, the most important representative of the Dada group in our context, Dada was »a state of being, more a form of inner mobility than an art movement« (Hausmann 1982b, 229). I will posthumously proclaim Perls the first and only Gestalt-Dada.