

Reflections on Self and Field in Gestalt and Elsewhere

This article appeared in the Gestalt Journal of Australia and New Zealand Vol 2 No 2 May 2006.

Abstract

In this article I relate some art works I have recently made to the Gestalt contact cycle and the modifications or disturbances of contact. I describe how these art works led me to wonder about various ideas of self in the literature. I inquire about Gestalt field theory, and if and how it relates to the idea of a noumenal field, as I intuitively experience this in relation to my art making practice. I suggest how Gestalt phenomenological fields and the noumenal field may relate to each other.

Introduction

As a Gestalt trainee, Gestalt theory and practice are still quite new to me. Learning and practicing the basic tools of Gestalt feels fresh and alive. I have also for some time been involved in art making, and I've found that Gestalt training has affected the art I make.

I'd like to consider some lino cuts I have recently made, and relate these to the themes of the self, Gestalt formation and the modifications or disturbances of contact in the Gestalt cycle.

I'd also like to consider the "fields" that I depict in these works, and relate these to Gestalt and other conceptions of self.

In my art making I test and assimilate ideas and experiences, sometimes unaware at the time of making the works that I am doing so. Only later does there come the "Aha!", the realisation that the art is revealing to me what has not yet been fully in my awareness. The best word I can find for this is "inquiry" – art as a rumination, a check on my own internal reality and my resistances to or acceptance of new scenarios and new ideas.

The three works I want to present are simple lino cuts – the first made over a year ago and the other two more recently. Over this period, as a second year Gestalt student, I was reading and

testing my understanding of the contact cycle, and modifications of contact, both in group and individual work. This seems to me to be a central aspect of Gestalt training, and one that has ramifications for who I imagine myself to be at any moment.

One of the questions I have asked is: What is the self that people talk about in Gestalt? I'd like to suggest a personal answer to this, and to suggest some alternative words that help clarify the question for myself.

The Contact Cycle

The theory of the cycle of gestalt formation and destruction (the contact cycle) is well described in many Gestalt books, for example Clarkson (1999). A reproduction of Clarkson's diagram of the cycle is shown in Figure 1.

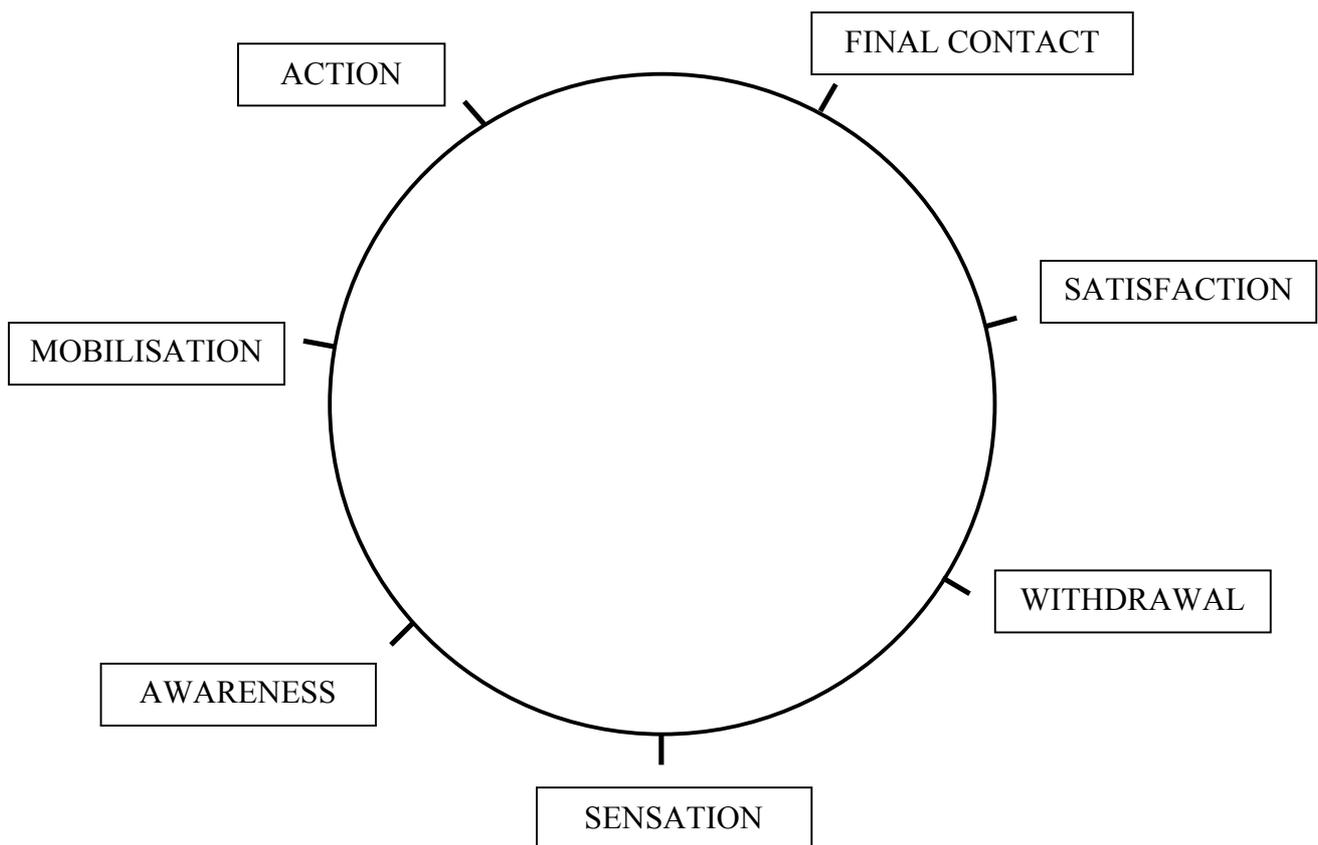


Figure 1 : Clarkson (1999) - The Cycle of Gestalt Formation and Destruction

Figure 1 is ostensibly just a circle with annotations depicting the well-known model, but as Clarkson says:

The process could equally well be represented as a wave-like diagram to indicate its rhythmic pulsating quality. (Clarkson, 1999, p 32)

This simple description sparks my interest more than the diagram does. In my experiences in the training group, I've found it difficult to relate the complex and interwoven processes that occur to the simple circle of Figure 1.

There is an exercise, working as a dyad, where the client "walks the circle", experiencing, when ready, successive stages in the cycle. The reality of doing this has for me been much more complex than the diagram implies – an experience of multiple "rhythmic pulsating" circles, occurring at each and at intermediate stages of the diagram shown in Figure 1.

The art works I present later in this article help me to understand and assimilate the processes that occur in the contact cycle.

Clarkson also says about Figure 1:

Here the circle is chosen to emphasise systemic circularity, interrelatedness and wholeness.
(Clarkson, 1999, p 32)

Visually, the circle is of course closed, and this fact has caused me difficulty in understanding the processes being modelled, and in connecting with the "interrelatedness" aspect of the cycle. This is further reinforced for me by Clarkson's use of the word "wholeness" – a word I associate with Jung's idea of a "whole" Self, located somewhere within us. It seems that the white space within the circle is intended to have meaning.

Later in Clarkson (1999), we meet the well-known diagram of the cycle of Gestalt formation and destruction showing the boundary disturbances. This is an extension of the diagram we've already seen. A reproduction of this diagram is shown in Figure 2.

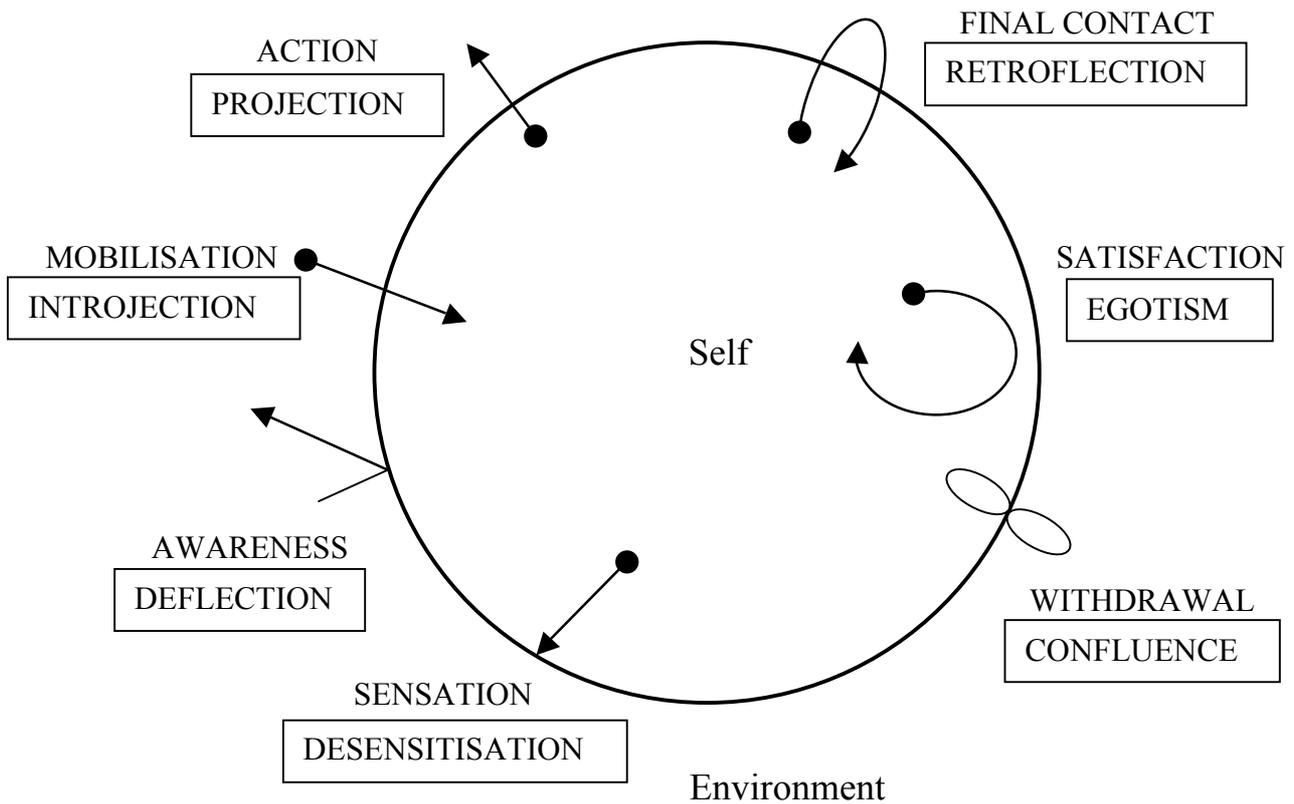


Figure 2 : Clarkson (1999) *The Cycle showing Boundary Disturbances*

Now it is clear that the interior of the circle *is* intended to have meaning – in fact the centre of the circle is labelled “Self”. The boundary disturbances themselves refer to both an inside and an outside to the circle, the boundary between self and environment. This arrangement of Self as the centre of a circle was described by Jung as an archetype. The capital “S” of Self raises the question for me of the difference between “Self” and the more common “self” as it is written in Gestalt.

Although there is a possible implication in Figure 2 of a kind of Jungian Self at the centre of the individual, Clarkson (1999) later makes an interesting statement that reminds me that we’ve been dealing with a simple model of mechanisms, rather than with an accurate analogue of reality:

..if the self is conceptualised as an ever re-creating here-and-now system of boundary contacts, personality can be said to be a description of one’s current limitations... (p 82)

Again it is the statement above that appeals to me much more than the diagram. The diagram seems prescriptive, yet the statement gives me an invitation, an open starting point for my own considerations and investigations, in my personal therapeutic work as well as in art making, of what this “self” could be in Gestalt.

In Clarkson’s statement I like the idea that this self is “ever re-creating”, and that “personality” is what we get when the flow of the boundary contacts becomes fixed or blocked. This fits well with my own experience in group and individual work of becoming aware in particular of my deflections, desensitisations and introjections – as though there is an “ever re-creating” veil between myself and others, the location and permeability of which I change to protect my identity as I perceive it.

There must be a context in which this re-creation of self is occurring; the self is not a construct in isolation. Gestalt uses the idea of the field to consider this context, and I’d like now to consider what is meant by this.

My interest in clarifying what is meant by the Gestalt field stems from the fact that, prior to studying Gestalt, I had for some time already been using the term field in my art making practice. Is Gestalt’s field the same field I had been thinking and talking about?

The Field in Gestalt

Field theory is central to contemporary Gestalt, and it’s been interesting for me to attempt to understand what Gestalt theorists and practitioners mean by the term. There is some debate even among theorists (Jacobs 2004):

There are some valuable aspects of using field theory as our contextual theory, but also some problems. I find valuable some of the principles derived from the amalgam of phenomenology, Lewin’s thought, Gestalt psychology, and even, to some extent, how fields are thought of in quantum physics...

One problem is that “field” seems to be defined differently by different theorists. Some people adhere to the Husserlian concept of field as a descriptor of one’s experiential world: a phenomenological field (p 40)

From this viewpoint, the field does not exist unless there is a subject to perceive it. Fields do not exist in themselves, in nature. This is also the position taken by Yontef and Simkin (1989):

The phenomenological field is defined by the observer and is meaningful only when one knows the frame of reference of the observer. The observer is necessary because what one sees is somewhat a function of how and when one looks. (p 324)

In contrast (Jacobs 2004):

Others prefer to define field in more reified terms, as a “thing” that is out there. There are field influences that operate on us, that are beyond us but that are part of the constitution of our experiential worlds, or our phenomenological fields. I think this is better described as our embeddedness in contexts. (p 41)

In a practical text intended for therapists, the phenomenological definition is given (Joyce and Sills 2001):

The three types of phenomenological investigation; the internal world of the client, the external world or environment (or counsellor) and the ever-changing relationships between them, can be called the overall context or the ‘field’. (p 24)

There is also Parlett’s (1991) well-known paper on field theory, in which he discusses the five principles of field theory (organisation, contemporaneity, singularity, changing process and possible relevance). Again, it is a phenomenological field to which he is referring.

It’s clear then that the Gestalt field is phenomenological – it is always related to phenomena. And it is experiential - it is always related to the observer. Here are three statements on the Gestalt field, from Parlett (1991), that I particularly like:

...field theory attempts to capture the interrelated flow of unfolding human reality, impregnated as it is with our personal meanings and significance.

There is no sharp cut-off between “internal” and “external”; the unified field is the meeting place of the two.

Field theory ... provides a way of appreciating reality.

Field theory seems difficult to approach in a Gestalt training. I can imagine a seasoned therapist, gradually deepening their understanding and use of the field approach over many years. Amongst students (and I include myself) I’ve noticed a tendency to reduce the field back to “myself” – the field first becomes “my field”, and then clear boundaries are expressed for this field – particularly in relation to what is “not in my field”.

One way of understanding the Gestalt field for me has been in relation to art making. For example, taking Parlett’s principle of organisation, I can see how a painting is never considered in isolation. Its meaning derives from the total situation - when it was painted and by whom, whether the artist is still living, and what is currently happening in the art market and in art theory. As another example, taking Parlett’s principle of possible relevance, I can see how in my art study it took me a long time to fully realise that even the smallest detail in an art work (and one that might even be judged as being “outside” the art work) can send unwanted messages to the viewer that spoil the work. An instance of this could be, in a sculptural piece intended to hang on a wall, how the work is actually attached to the wall, and whether the attachment can be seen.

The field I want to discuss now is somewhat different from the phenomenological field. This is the field I’ve been working with intuitively in my art practice; I call it the *noumenal field* to distinguish it from the phenomenological.

The Noumenal Field

The noumenal field has influenced my art making for some time, and it was through working with the idea of this field that I came into contact with Gestalt and the phenomenological field. I use the term noumenal in the sense that Kant distinguished it from the phenomenological. The noumenon, always in the singular, was considered by Kant to be the indescribable reality that underlies phenomena. (The word noumenal derives from the Greek *noos*, the mind, and is etymologically different from the word numinous, first described by Rudolph Otto, which derives from the Latin *numen*, divinity.)

Wei Wu Wei (2002) puts the distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenological very simply:

The phenomenal, objective, relative world of sense impressions is an interpretation by divided and reasoning mind (which operates by a comparison of opposites) of noumenon, the absolute, subject, none of which (if you regard them as different in any way or as aspects of one whole) it is able directly to perceive. (p 41)

I first became interested in the word “field” while working on my Masters thesis, as described in Dowd (2001):

The word [field] seems to hold in itself intuitions about the pre-imaginal. I can only suggest that for me the imaginal roots of this word go very deep... (p I-16)

My interest in the noumenal field subsequently strengthened after a period of considering actual fields in landscapes, and drawing and making carved wooden sculptures of and about fields in these landscapes. Over time, the word “field” became charged for me with emotion and an intuited meaning. This culminated in 2003 in a momentary experience of the entire construction of myself, my identity, collapsing - leaving an “empty” witnessing entity that could plainly see that a field, a “deep structure” or “matrix”, eternally underlies that personal construction.

Conceptually, the noumenal field is the “limit point” to which phenomenological fields can be taken. In other words, if in consideration of a phenomenological field I continually extend my interest further then finally I will take in everything, including the notions of time and space. “I” will have arrived at the noumenal field (except that there will be no “I” to arrive – “myself” will have collapsed). In fact, one Sydney Gestalt practitioner calls the (Gestalt) phenomenological field the “fertile void” (Blicharski 2005) and this for me has a resonance with the noumenal field. There is also somewhat of a flavour of the noumenal field for me in the quotation from Jacobs cited above (Jacobs 2004, p 41).

In summary, for me the noumenal field has the following:

- It has no attributes. Attributes, such as phenomenological fields, arise within it.
- It has no limits.
- It is not personal nor is it group-oriented.
- It is an enabler; a deep structure or matrix from which attributes, the personal and the group arise.
- It is not in time or space. Both of these arise from it.

Field ("Black Snake")

The foregoing discussion of the noumenal field is background to the art works I want to present. The first work, *Field ("Black Snake")* is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Field ("Black Snake"), Lino Cut, 30 x 30 cm

The "Black Snake" form in this work has connections for me with the self as described in the contact cycle and the modifications of contact. There are obvious similarities to the Gestalt cycle diagrams in the circularity of the piece. I wanted to create something that had an inside and an outside, but yet where there could be a fluid movement between the two.

Around and through the “Black Snake” “figure” are the reference marks I used to denote the noumenal field. The self is bathed in the noumenal field (or, more accurately, arises from it).

The work reveals to me some loosening of fixed gestalts within myself. The work surprised me when I first printed it - it shows me something about how I can be more fluid in my connections to the environment. At various times I have felt it relates to eyes and seeing, ears and hearing, stomachs and consuming/regurgitating/excreting and lungs and breathing.

Reading the quotation from Clarkson given above (Clarkson, 1999, p82), after making the work, I was also drawn to wondering about metaphors for the self she refers to here. The self depicted in Field (“Black Snake”) could be amoebic, sac-like, with a membranous boundary that responds in the here-and-now to the environment by smoothly modifying the permeability of its membrane, the boundary, to perform modifications of contact with that environment. This is like filter feeders, animals that quietly filter what they need from the environment.

Art making too, is a filtering of the environment, an act of taking from a potentially hostile external environment that which can nourish the internal world; and subsequently releasing a modified form (the art work) of what was taken in, as a gesture to oneself and to the environment. What is released is a transformed version of raw experience.

The work does not need to be successful, in the conventional sense of an art work, in order for it to work successfully as a transformative device. The wood carvings I mentioned earlier, of flat fields in landscapes, fall into this category; as conventional sculptural objects they are uninteresting, partly because the scale is wrong - the viewer would need to be bug-sized for them to work. But as carving actions they were very powerful, because the artist could “be” bug-sized while carving them. (The sculptures work better, in a conventional sense, as props for photography.) It is sad when people censor themselves from art making because of a conventional ideal of the products of their making.

Children are good at this filtering of the environment through making – for example in their focussed creations at the beach of detailed sand and shell works which, if one can enter the scale of the works, are powerful. And when finished, the child moves on, unconcerned for the finished “product”.

Field (“Atoll”)

The second work, *Field (“Atoll”)*, which I made more recently, is shown in Figure 4. In shape, this work is more consciously connected to the contact cycle diagrams – the thoughts above had already occurred to me prior to making the work.

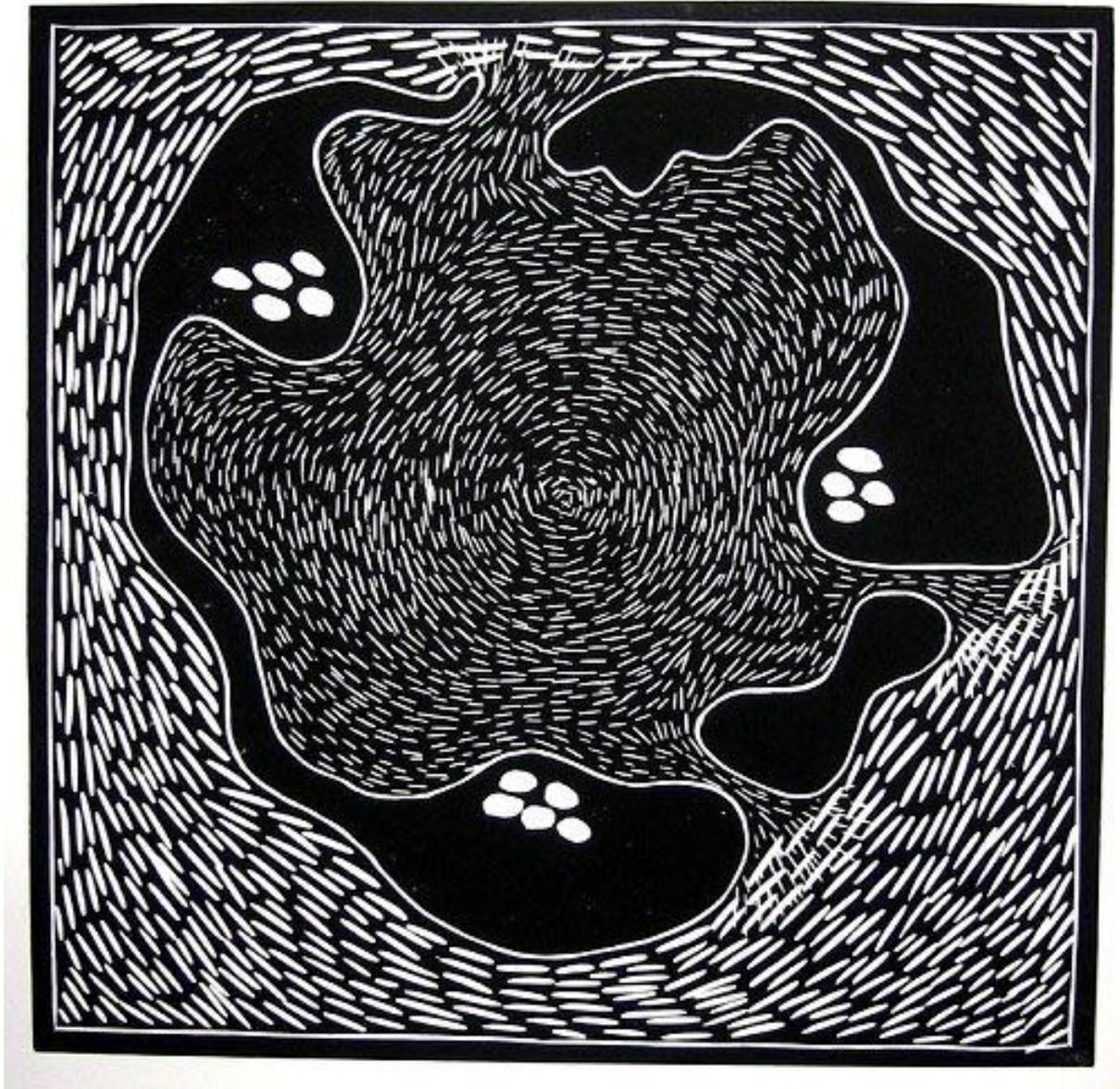


Figure 4: *Field (“Atoll”)*, Lino Cut, 30 x 30 cm

In this work I'm interested in the extent of space contained within the boundary created by the sausage-shaped selflets. I have a sense of this extent being vast, and internal to "my" self, of it being the core. Rather than finding a Jungian "Self" deep inside me, just below the constructed selflets there is emptiness, the noumenal field. An intuition of the noumenal field as it is found within me is identical to that as found outside – the noumenal field doesn't care for the distinction of inside/outside.

I'm reminded also of waveguide theory in physics. Electrical waveguides are used when wires are no longer needed because the frequency of the wave (or electrical field) is very high, and the wave wants only to cling to the surface of the wire. The waveguide is an "empty" tube by which the electrical field is guided; the energy is at the surface (boundary) of the tube, yet the "empty" space is necessary for the propagation of the field.

Perhaps we are, or can be, like atolls, ductile over the time dimension, forming a waveguide of myriad selflets, responsive to the noumenal field in which we are immersed, and of which we are ultimately composed.

Field ("Lucky")

The third work, *Field ("Lucky")* is shown in Figure 5.

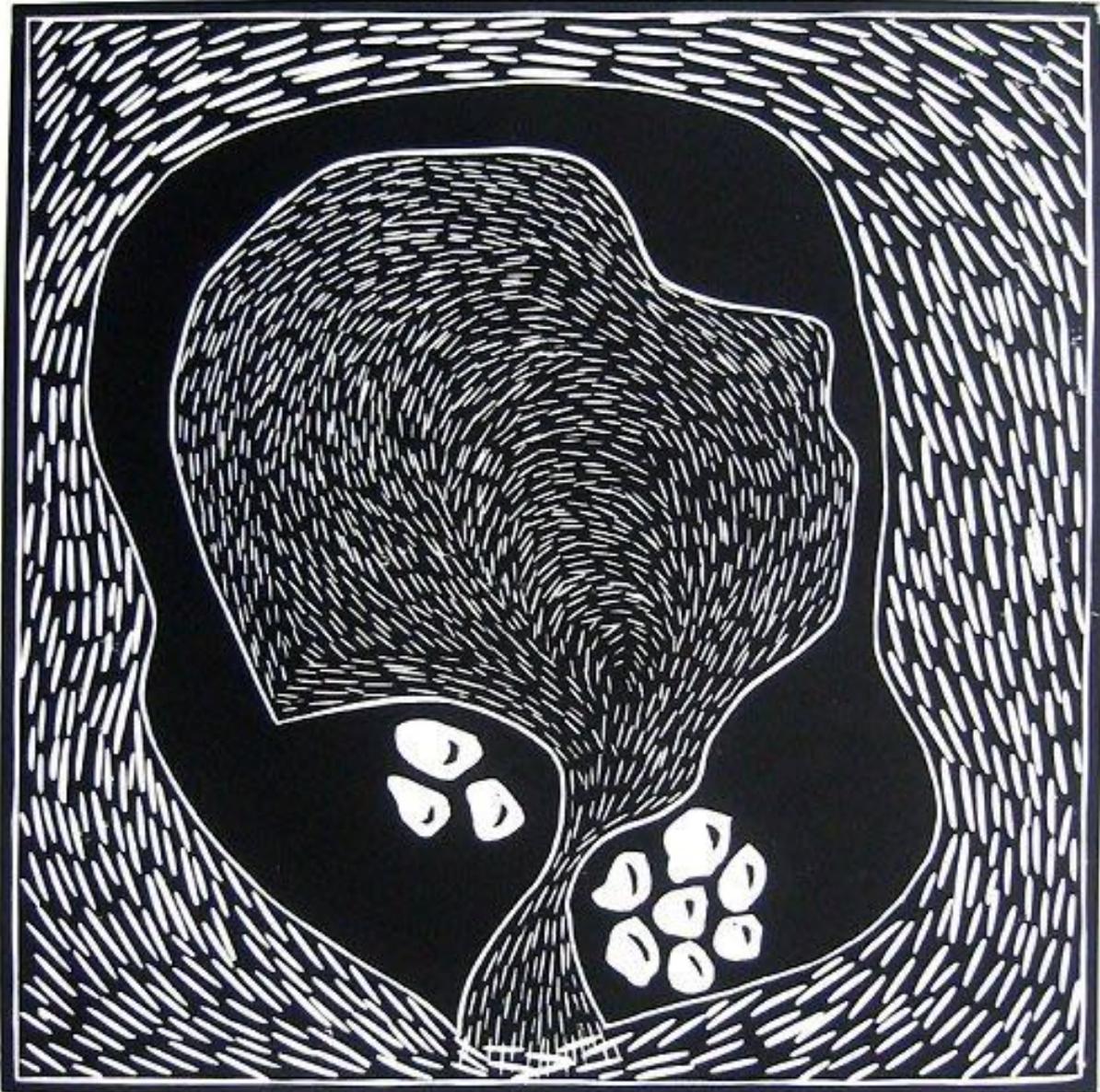


Figure 5:Field ("Lucky") Lino Cut, 30 x 30 cm

The “Lucky” nickname comes from the work’s horseshoe-shape. But the eyes or eyelets seem lucky as well – or are they mouths? Whether they are eyes or mouths, they seem to be attentive to the embouchure of the self-form. I am reminded of Perls’ frequent reference to chewing in assimilating the environment.

Another aspect is the slaughtered lamb. (The lamb could be seen in the work as hanging from a hook.) The sacrificial lamb is a common Old Testament symbol. An example is:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

There is a feeling of the sacrifice of an older self to enable a more fluid, breathing, mouth-opening self to arise from the corpse. Bathed again, of course, in the noumenal field.

I-Concept = (Small-s) self

I think of the black forms depicted in the art works as “selves” or “selflets”. I have tried not to use the term “self” (but it is hard to avoid the term) to avoid the confusion between (small-s) self and the (large-S) Self of Jung and others.

What is the (small-s) self we refer to so often? There are many definitions for this. Here is a quite well known one that I like (Wei Wu Wei, 2002):

Why are you unhappy?
Because 99.9 per cent
Of everything you think,
And of everything you do,
Is for yourself -
And there isn't one. (p 7)

The self Wei Wu Wei is referring to here is the same (small-s) self that Gestalt talks of in relation to the cycle of gestalt formation. The fact that for Wei Wu Wei this self does not actually exist in no way invalidates Gestalt's interest in it.

What the Gestalt model gives us is the mechanisms of how our constructed identities, that which I call “myself”, can come more into accord with the noumenal field in the here-and-now, in the way that the Taoists talked about finding the Watercourse Way. The Gestalt model is not concerned (nor should it be) with whether this identity has any actual reality.

The self is a fiction - we say “I” sufficiently often to deeply embed “I” as a concept. As Krishnamurti said, there are thoughts but there is no thinker. What has happened over our lives is that thoughts have interacted with memory (older thoughts) and have formed comparison thoughts (discriminations). Our identity is formed through this ability of thoughts to compare new and old thoughts, at ever more complex levels, until there is an illusionary certainty of a “basis” to it all – an “I”. Again, to quote Wei Wu Wei (2002):

We do not possess an “ego”.

We are possessed by the idea of one. (p 52)

What Gestalt can do with practical models such as the contact cycle is to describe the I-constructions, as they appear at this time and place. It is not concerned to destroy the constructions entirely.

For this reason it’s better to call the (small-s) self the “I-concept” – a complex of many selflets, varying in number and quality over time and place. These selflets are in constant dialogue with their environments – “environments” in the plural because they are making continual assessments as to what constitutes “environment” for them. They reflexively define themselves in terms of what they are *not* – in the negative rather than in the positive.

I imagine a hypothetical therapeutic screen in which animated simulations of contact cycles (Figure 2), show shifting boundaries and related disturbances in contact, as selflets renegotiate and define what they are not – akin to real-time weather simulations.

I note in passing that Polster (1995) talks of a *population* of selves. He says:

Drawing elemental experiences together with the fluidity of metal filings being attracted to moving magnets, the person creates and recreates multiple selves. (p 41)

Noumenal Field = (Large-S) Self

Most of us at some time have had moments when an intuited reality breaks through our constructed notions of who we are, and perhaps makes us question the relative importance of

aspects of our lives. Wei Wu Wei (2002) has some interesting things to say about these kinds of experiences:

Thoughts “arise” in the conditioned aspect of consciousness. In the interval between thoughts consciousness shines clear. To the time-sense this interval is imperceptible, and only intuition has the prerequisite rapidity to utilise these intervals. (p 125)

Intuition ... is our impersonal “self” (using the term as Vedantists do), and when we recognise this we become it for the duration of the apprehension. We are just being ourselves, what we are when we are no longer “we”. (p126)

The “interval between” is pure impersonal I. (p126)

The intuited reality described here is the noumenal field –who we are, but of course not who we are personally (Wei Wu Wei says it is “our impersonal self”, it is “impersonal I”). We cannot give it attributes such as “my or “our” noumenal field, it is singular (there cannot be “noumenal fields”) yet it does not have the boundaries or limits usually implied by a singularity. Although this could appear somewhat mystical, I don’t think it needs to be seen as such – the difficulty in the description is that we are limited to language and cognition, relative realities that themselves arise from the noumenal field.

My own momentary experience of the noumenal field, mentioned earlier, was of the nature of an intuition, as this is described by Wei Wu Wei in the quotation above. The witness of the truth of the noumenal field was the intuition – as Wei Wu Wei says, “we become it for the duration of the apprehension”. In fact, it is not really correct to call this intuition an experience at all – because an experience would relate to something apprehended through the senses, it would relate to the phenomenological.

Why bother to give what was intuited the name “noumenal field”? Only because in this psyche the imaginal “motif” for the intuition happens to be a field, the kind of field that is seen in a landscape. What we are referring to is of course not a “field” at all, and it is also not

a thing at all. While there is a danger in calling such a no-thing a “field” (the word “void” may be better) , there is a truth in this naming of it as a “field” which appeals to me deeply.

For me, the noumenal field is the “layer” behind the diagrams of Figures 1 and 2, rather than being in the centre of them. In fact, a better analogy is that the paper of this journal is the layer, the support and enabler, of the diagrams that appear on it. The physical paper is so different from the ideas expressed in the diagrams that we could call them of different dimensions; none the less, the physical paper materially supports and enables the ideas presented. Clarkson’s “Self” (in Figure 2) could better be thought of as this layer, the noumenal field.

Employing the notion of a noumenal field rather than a (large-S) Self also helps to disentangle confusions as to whether the latter term is referring to a hypothetical “true” aspect of us as an individual. As Spinelli (2005) writes:

...the notion of the ‘true’ self... is both a relatively recent historical development in Western thought and culture and remains significantly alien to a great many past and current cultures and societies who have no place in their worldviews for a singular, permanent, ‘real’ self... (p 184)

The idea of the noumenal field as a layer also fits well with Bohm’s implicate order, which he considered to be a “background” dimension to our normal experienced explicate order (Bohm 1980). Relativity theory and quantum theory led Bohm to propose that:

What we call empty space contains an immense background of energy, and that matter as we know it is a small ‘quantised’ wavelike excitation on top of this background....(p 191)

...what we perceive through the senses as empty space is actually the plenum, which is the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves. The things that appear to our senses are derivative forms and their true meaning can only be seen when we consider the plenum, in which they are generated and sustained, and into which they must ultimately vanish. (p 192)

I'm also drawn to the seventeenth century writings of the English chaplain Thomas Traherne, with his meditations on the "field", particularly in his *Centuries of Meditations*. Although some of his works have been lost, and some damaged by editors, gems remain. In his *First Century*, Traherne describes a field without limit (Bradford 1991):

The world is unknown, till the value and glory of it is seen: till the beauty and the serviceableness of its parts are considered. When you enter into it, it is an *illimited field* of variety and beauty: where you may lose yourself in the multitude of wonders and delights. (p 192, Number 18 – the italics are mine.)

And from his *Fifth Century*:

Infinity of space is like a painters table, prepared for the ground and field of those colours that are to be laid thereon. (p 312, Number 5.)

But the infinite immovable duration is eternity, the place and duration of all things, even of infinite space itself: the cause and end, the author and beautifier, the life and perfection of all. (p 313, Number 7.)

And lastly, from Traherne's poem *My Spirit*, one of the *Dobell Poems*:

I felt no dross nor matter in my soul,
No brims nor borders, such as in a bowl
We see, *my essence was capacity*. (p 26 – my italics.)

Traherne had an intuitive knowledge of this field, where his "essence was capacity" rather than any attributes. His conception fits well with the noumenal field.

Turning to the origins of Gestalt, what we've been considering may shed light on a confusion described by Crocker (1999), relating to the distinction between two seemingly contradictory descriptions of self in Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951) (PHG). Crocker states:

There is a lack of clarity among Gestalt therapists as to the nature of the self. The primary cause of this is the confusion which is found in the PHG text itself. There Goodman moves back and forth

between the assertion that the self is nothing more than (A) the system of contacts in a difficult and transitory field, and (B) the agent of growth. (p167)

Crocker goes on to list examples of this confusion in the PHG text. The distinction between (small-s) self as I-concept, and (large-S) Self as noumenal field, could possibly resolve the apparent conflict. I-concept would be case (A) as described by Crocker, and noumenal field would be case (B). When considering case (B), the agency of growth, I think of Bohm's description of the implicate order as being energised, and as matter (and presumably psyche) being "wavelike excitation on top of this background" (Bohm 1980, p 191, quoted above). And it's worthwhile remembering that in neither case (A) or (B) is self a "thing".

Communicating the Intuition

Turning back, once more, to my own momentary intuition of the noumenal field, I continually find there is an urge to communicate what this was about, irrespective of the difficulty of doing so. This need to communicate was crucial immediately upon having the intuition, and the need now informs my art practice.

I wrote the following lines soon after the intuition:

Pale Loam

a scaffold
carefully constructed

collapses

reveals mark
scent

a pale loam
tasting of me.

I'm also continually aware that my attempts to communicate do not do justice to the intuition – speaking, writing and art making are all frail media in the face of this. A form of

communication that I did find quite “true”, soon after the event, was the use of a mudra that arose spontaneously. Figure 6 shows me making this mudra.



Figure 6: Mudra For a Momentary Intuition of the Field

The poem that accompanies this mudra is:

Mudra

to understand in an instant
I am deep structure

to form a grid with open hands
one laid on the other

as mudra to my mother
my matrix

to the moment of collapsing
a construction

if only for that
a moment.

Conclusions

In this article I've been interested to relate some art works I've made to the Gestalt contact cycle, and to the phenomenological and noumenal fields.

In so doing it's been useful to see the value of the contact cycle, a simple process model that not only works in practice, but allows me the space to develop ideas such as the ones presented here. As pointed out to me recently (Blicharski 2005), basic Gestalt theory is possibly unique in that it provides "low-altitude" maps of the territory. It's more like a street map, providing a means of navigation, than an atlas of the world, which serves a different purpose.

I've suggested that to resolve the frequent confusions between the (small-s) self and the (large-S) Self we can employ the terms I-concept and noumenal field.

This resolves some confusion for myself and may do for others, however such a direct translation will not always apply (Powell 1982):

The self underlies all phenomena; it is that which makes it possible for phenomena to manifest themselves and thus comprises these phenomena and the observer. (p 34)

The (small-s) "self" described here equates to the idea of the noumenal field.

Because I'm drawn to landscapes and the metaphors that they hold for inner landscapes, and enjoy depicting a flavour of these inner landscapes in visual art, it has been interesting to relate the word "field" to the use of the term in Gestalt. It's been useful to distinguish this noumenal field intuited in art-making from Gestalt's phenomenological fields.

I am not suggesting any limitation in Gestalt's concept of the phenomenological field.

However, it's interesting to me, and possibly to others, to wonder what it is that we encounter when we continually expand the ambit of the phenomenological fields we are considering at any time. At "some point" a dimensional rupture occurs and then what we are "encountering" is the noumenal field. I say "encountering" because we, and our encountering, is itself arising

from the noumenal field. It is important to have such an insight into that from which phenomenological fields arise. As Traherne said (Bradford 1991):

... you must have glorious principles implanted in your nature; a clear eye able to see far off; a great and generous heart, apt to enjoy at any distance; a good and liberal soul prone to delight in the felicity of all; and an infinite delight to be their treasure. (p 201)

For me, the noumenal field is such a “glorious principle”.

And although the works of the 16th century German mystic Jacob Boehme are notoriously difficult to decipher, I wonder if he also has wisdom to offer, gained in his life-changing fifteen-minute “interval between”, concerning the *Ungrund*:

For I saw and knew the Being of all things, the ground and the unground (*Ungrund*) (quoted in Stoudt 1957, p 60)

As Stoudt (1957) says:

The *Ungrund's* dark craving is unfathomable, without essence, directed towards being where it can feel, will, know, love and be felt, willed, known, and loved (p 202)

The report of this “craving”, working in these reciprocal ways, is for me both liberating and energising.

References

Blicharski, B. (Sydney-based consultant psychiatrist), 2005. Private discussions.

Bohm, D., 1980. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Bradford., A. (ed.), 1991. *Thomas Traherne - Selected Poems and Prose*. London: Penguin Classics.

Clarkson, P.,1989. *Gestalt Counselling in Action* (second edition). London: Sage Publications.

- Crocker, S. F., 1999. *A Well-Lived Life – Essays in Gestalt Therapy*. Cambridge: Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Press.
- Dowd, R., 2001. *An Inquiry into an Imaginal Landscape*. MA(Hons) Thesis, School Of Contemporary Arts, The University of Western Sydney.
- Jacobs, L. *Ethics of Context and Field: The Practices of Care, Inclusion and Openness to Dialogue*. In Lee R.G. (ed.), 2004. *The Values of Connection – A Relational Approach to Ethics*. Cambridge: GestaltPress.
- Joyce, P. and Sills, C., 2001. *Skills in Gestalt Counselling and Psychotherapy*. London: Sage Publications.
- Parlett, M., 1991. *Reflections on Field Theory*. British Gestalt Journal, Vol. 1, No. 2.
- Perls, F.S., Hefferline R.F., Goodman P., 1951. *Gestalt Therapy – Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. USA: Penguin Books.
- Polster, E., 1995. *A Population of Selves: A Therapeutic Exploration of Personal Diversity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Powell, R., 1982. *Return to Meaningfulness*. San Diego: Avant.
- Spinelli, E., 2005. *The Interpreted World – An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology*. London: Sage Publications.
- Stoudt J.J., 1957. *Sunrise to Eternity: A Study in Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- Yontef, G.M. and Simkin, J.S., *Gestalt Therapy*. In Corsini, R.J. and Wedding, D., 1989. *Current Psychotherapies*. Los Angeles: Behaviour Books.
- Wei Wu Wei, 2002. *Ask the Awakened – The Negative Way*. London: Kegan Paul.

Ron Dowd BE(Hons), ME, BFA, MA(Hons)

I am a third year trainee at the Sydney Gestalt Centre. I have a background in Information Technology and have also made visual art for the past 16 years. A selection of my art works is on my web site, www.rondowd.com. Art making for me is an inquiry, an intimate activity of assimilating the world and of communicating with myself and others. I am interested to explore how Gestalt influences this process.