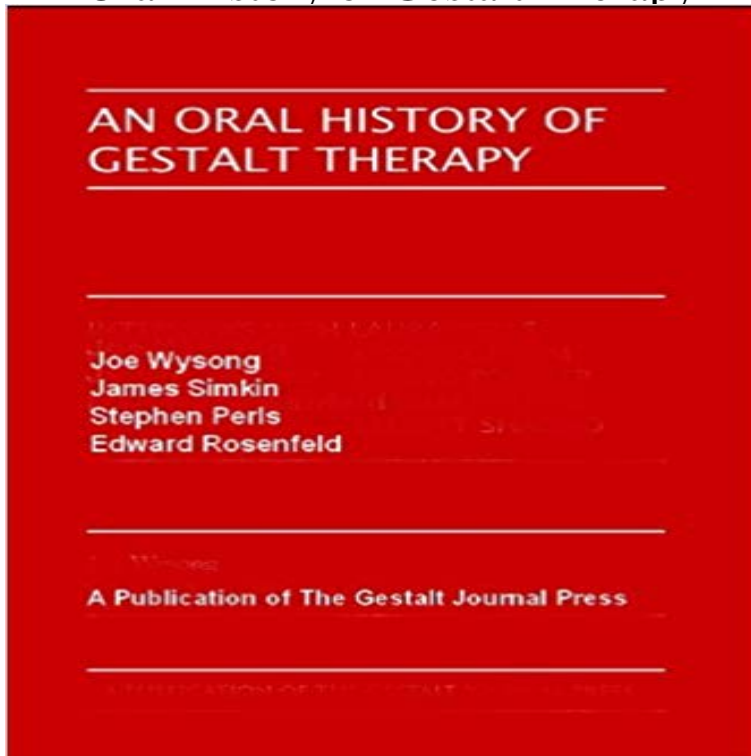


An Oral History of Gestalt Therapy



The original edition of *An Oral History of Gestalt Therapy* included interviews with Laura Perls, Isadore From, Erving & Miriam Polster, and Elliott Shapiro. For this special edition, there are two additions: an interview with Frederick (Fritz) Perls and a talk delivered by the Perls son, Stephen, at the 15th Annual Conference of The Gestalt Journal in 1993. The seeds of Gestalt therapy were planted when a study group formed in 1948 began meeting weekly in New York City. The group would provide the nucleus of The New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy, established in 1952 concurrent with the publication of *Gestalt Therapy*. The founding members of the group were Paul Weisz, Paul Goodman, Elliot Shapiro, Frederick and Laura Perls, Sylvester Buck Eastman and Isadore From. Of the group, only Isadore From and Paul Goodman, with Frederick and Laura Perls, began teaching the theoretical constructs of Gestalt therapy beyond the boundaries of the original group. When Frederick Perls took his first extended leave from New York, he settled in Los Angeles and asked Isadore From to join him in there as assistant teacher. He and Perls shared an office near Hollywood Boulevard. The two started a jointly led training group. In less than a year, Perls left California and turned his students and patients over to From who remained in Los Angeles for two years practicing and teaching Gestalt therapy. In 1952, From decided to take an extended trip to Europe. When told of From's decision, Perls asked him to look up a psychologist and a urologist, both of whom had read *Gestalt Therapy* and were interested in training. He stayed in Europe from 1952 to 1953, starting the first Gestalt therapy instructional program outside the United States. From's European seminars and programs grew to such an extent that he eventually purchased a house in the south of France that would be the base for

his European teaching activities until 1984, when he began limiting his teaching primarily to the United States. Other Gestalt trainers would begin visiting Europe almost two decades later, but none have had the impact of From (through sheer numbers of students from more than twenty-five European nations plus more throughout the world who came to Europe for more than thirty years specifically to study with From) on the development and acceptance of Gestalt therapy in Europe. In 1953, a group in Cleveland, Ohio, who had attended workshops led by Frederick Perls, asked Fritz Perls, Laura Perls, Paul Goodman, Paul Weisz and Isadore From to begin a training program. In 1954 the program was finalized as the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland. By 1954, Isadore From was involved in the first ever ongoing Gestalt therapy training programs in New York, California, Cleveland, and Europe. Another member of the original study group, Elliott Shapiro became an educational reformer whose work was chronicled in Nat Hentofs minor classic, *Our Children are Dying*. As the Cleveland Institute flourished, Erving and Miriam Polster, key members of the Cleveland faculty and the coauthors of *Gestalt Therapy Integrated*, broadened the worldwide recognition of Gestalt therapy through their global training activities. Of the individuals appearing here, only Erv Polster and the Perls son, Stephen, are still alive. The others appear through the transcriptions of interviews, recorded live conducted by people who knew them well and had a deep appreciation for their clinical and theoretical talents.

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