



**Fritz Perls:**

**What is Gestalt Therapy?**

**A nearly forgotten interview with Fritz Perls (the co-founder of Gestalt Therapy) by Adelaide Bry**



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Fritz Perls

Here you will find the German version of this interview,

Adelaide Bry: Dr. Perls, what is Gestalt Therapy?

Dr. Perls: Discussing, talking, explaining is unreal to me. I hate intellectualizing, don't you?

A. B.: Sometimes, but I want to interview you. want to know about about Gestalt Therapy. So...

Dr. Perls: Let's try something else. You be the Patient. *Be real* ... no more intellectualizing.

A. B.: Well, if it's what you want, I'll try it. I'll try being the patient. ... Here's what I'd say to you then: "I'm Adelaide and I come to you, Fritz Perls, as a patient. I'm depressed and I also have this physiologically expressed fear of flying. Ma hands get clammy. Ma heart beats rapidly." Now what?

Dr. Perls: I'd cure you of your physiologically expressed fear of flying in five minutes.

A. B. . Oh, you would? All right. How would you do that?

Dr. Perls: Close your eyes. Go into the airplane. Realize you're not in a real airplane, just in your fantasy. So fantasy is going to help you see what you experience when you are flying.

A. B.: Already my heart begins to beat faster ...

Dr. Perls: Don't open your eyes ...

A. B.: All right ...

Dr. Perls: Your heart begins to beat faster ... go on.

A. B.: I see the back of the pilot up there, and you know I'm not sure whether he can do it.

Dr. Perls: Good. Get up and tell him that.

A. B.: I tap him on the shoulder, he looks around, I say, "Are you keeping your eyes on the road?" He shoves me away and I go back to my seat.

Dr. Perls: Now you don't go back to your seat. Change seats. You're the pilot. [Dr. Perls asked me to get up, sit in another chair facing the one I was previously sitting in. Each time I changed roles, I changed seats.]

A. B.: I'm the pilot. What is this woman doing interfering with me? Get out of the cockpit and get back to your seat. *I know what I'm doing.*

Dr. Perls: I don't believe your voice. Listen to your voice.

A. B.: [As airplane pilot] I'm sorry, madam, I'm very sorry, madam, terribly sorry, but we do know

how to run this airplane, and would you please go back to your seat. Everything is fine and under control.

Dr. Perls: O.K. now. What's your name? Adelaide? Adelaide?

A. B.: [As Adelaide] I'd like to go back to my seat, but I'm upset about this airplane, because I don't like to be off the ground. I don't like to be fifty thousand feet up in the air. It's not natural to me.

Dr. Perls: O.K., now you are a writer - write this script.

A. B.: [As pilot] Listen, we do the best we do the best we can, we're human beings, too. You know this plane is checked by Pan American and this plane cost five million dollars and believe me, if there's one thing we like it's money, and every time a plane goes down we lose money, we lose people. It's very bad for our public relations and we do everything possible to keep this plane in the air. Now, if once in a while ... my God ... if once in a while we slip up, that's the way it goes and you gotta take your chances on this earth. So far we've had absolutely no transatlantic accidents. Do you realize that? [As Adelaide] But, I, me, it would be just my fate going to London, you know, going to London, whup down in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. But, your know, so what. So I'd miss old age, I'd miss a lot of horrible things, so maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all.

[As pilot] Listen, lady that's no way to think when you're going off on a holiday. You're being absolutely stupid.

Dr. Perls: Say this again.

A. B.: [As pilot] You're being absolutely stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid. What the hell. I do this for a living. Even if I'm making fifty thousand a year. I can do something else. I do this for a living. Every day-no, not every day-fifteen days a month I do this for a living and you are a stupid woman.

[As Adelaide] I really know I'm stupid. That's a joke, I know I'm stupid. You know, I have to tell you ... I've even taken flying lessons. I took flying lessons to try to do something about the fear, *in little Piper Cubs*.

Dr. Perls: Don't tell me ...

A. B.: [As pilot] Piper Cubs, oh, Piper Cubs, right. Piper Cubs, that's a joke. You're in a Boing 707, Piper Cubs. There's no relationship between the two of them. I suggest, madam, that you go back to your seat, and that you let me ...

Dr. Perls: I suggest something else. You take over now, the plane. You go to the pilot's seat.

A. B.: [As Adelaide] Oooooooooo, I love it. All I know is I love being in control.

Dr. Perls: Don't tell me. This is him.

A. B.: [As Adelaide] Listen, I can fly this plane better than you can with my left hand behind my back. You know there are a few little dials and technical things around here, but I could learn that in about a couple of months. You know I'm bright enough to learn that. Now you sit back there and I'm going to run this show.

Dr. Perls: Say this again: "I'm going to run the show."

A. B.: I'm going to run this show.

Dr. Perls: Again.

A. B.: I'm going to run this show.

Dr. Perls: Say this with your whole body.

A. B.: I'm going to run this show.

Dr. Perls: Now, say this to me: "Fritz, I'm ..."

A. B.: Fritz, I'm going to run this show.

Dr. Perls: Again.

A. B.: I'm going to run this show.

Dr. Perls: Have you learned something?

A. B.: Yeah, that's me - *unfortunately*.

Dr. Perls: There you get a little piece of Gestalt therapy.

A. B.: It's beautiful.

Dr. Perls: You get an example now that *we are not analyzing*. We are just integrating. You have given the pattern. Some of your domineering needs, and I let you take it back so you feel a little bit stronger.

A. B.: Right, right.

Dr. Perls: That's Gestalt Therapy.

A. B.: I see. Does all Gestalt work this way? ... I saw you do it yesterday in a demonstration. Do you always do it with this kind of technique, with a person changing roles and seats to emphasize a point?

Dr. Perls: Whenever I see a polarity, yes. When we have two opposites. You'll notice these opposites are fighting. The passenger and the pilot are enemies. There are enemies because they don't listen to each other. In this dialogue, by realizing this other part, which seems to be outside of you, persecuting you, you see it is actually you, yourself. So you take those feelings back inside, you re-assimilate a little of the domineering needs.

A. B.: Well really, though, maybe in order for me to understand this deeply, we would have to go through it twenty times or twenty years. Or would we have to spend a year, maybe working on this in order for it to get inside of me?

Dr. Perls: No, no, no, no. Now I have to tell you what I said yesterday, that I finally found a solution. You don't need to stay twenty years on the couch or have year in, year out therapy. We can do the whole thing in about three months. From neurosis to authenticity. And the solution is the therapeutic community: where we come together, work together, and do the therapy together. The core of the therapy is learning to confront your opposites. Once you know this way of confronting yourself with opposites, next time you might be able to do it easier. If I give you, for instance, an example of what is the most frequent opposite inside people, then you'll see what will happen from this. The most frequent opposite example is the top dog and the underdog. And we will extrapolate for this a bit.

A. B.: All right.

Dr. Perls: Now. The top dog sits here [in a chair]. The top dog starts, "Adelaide, you should ..." [Again, I change seats as I change roles.]

A. B.: [As top dog] Adelaide, you should. You should get up every morning at seven o'clock. Not eat too much. Exercise. Be absolutely efficient about your writing. Get to the typewriter at eight o'clock in the morning.

Dr. Perls: Now do this stronger ...

A. B.: [As a top dog] YOU SHOULD GET TO THE TYPEWRITER AT EIGHT IN THE MORNING.

Dr. Perls: Are you aware that you are still keeping five inches away from her?

A. B.: [As top dog] Oh. I'm going to smack you down because ... I'm going to smack you down because you're not living life, well, efficiently on all levels. You're too full of conflict; you're too full of horseshit; you haven't been a good mother to your children.

Dr. Perls: O.K., change seats. *You're* the underdog.

A. B.: [As underdog] I am a very needy person. I can't make it on my own. I've got to have a man now to take care of me. I can't stand up myself.

Dr. Perls: Now, write this script.

A. B.: [As underdog] He's not perfect. (O.K., neither am I), he's here and I like him very much. But if I get married, I'm not free.

Dr. Perls: Are you aware that the underdog is on the defense?

A. B.: Yes.

Dr. Perls: Have you noticed this? Each time you change seats, you dross legs and squeeze your genitals and even that moment you close yourself up completely.

A. B.: When I become the top dog?

Dr. Perls: I don't know. Right now just be aware that you're completely closed. Now talk to top dog again.

A. B.: [As top dog] All right. You're a sweet little girl, but you're just not developing your potential and your conflict is because you're afraid to be an independent human being. And you've seen enough horseshit around here, you saw it in the encounter group last night [at a psychological convention in Washington, D.C.]; you perceive how goddamned afraid everybody is in terms of their ego and social relationships and you don't have that hangup ... You've really got it made if you only knew how to act. You don't have half the fears of all these people around here. You're about twenty levels beyond that already, and you're afraid to step into the role. Those people are just like scared little mice and you're not that at all.

Dr. Perls: Do you notice that top dog is changing into pleading, persuading?

A. B.: Yes. Well, I know that I probably have a lot more insight than some ...

[As underdog] You cannot make me do what I don't want to do. Your can't. You can't.

Dr. Perls: You are already getting spiteful, you're on the defensive.

A. B.: [As top dog] O.K. If your don't want to do it, you don't want to do it. You don't have to achieve all this goddamned horseshit you think you have to achieve; just go along and be. So, you thought one day your were going to be a good writer, and you didn't have the one thing that it takes to be the great writer, and that is the ability to sit on your ass alone eight hours a day. And if you don't have it, you don't have it. And who the hell cares. Well, it's sort of a regret, but I don't feel that regretful any more, you know. So far around it's been interesting. It's been fun. Whatever it is ...

Dr. Perls: What do you do with your hands?

A. B.: Hmmmm? Equivocating? I want to use them in some way. I want to use them in some way. Maybe to, uh ... I think I want to use them at the typewriter. I want to use them.

Dr. Perls: Why?

A. B.: [As underdog] Approval, you know. Love and approval. You're the big daddy and I want you to say, "Adelaide, you're great. You really are. You're really great. You're pretty goddamned good."

And, uh ... that's all it is to be a human being on this earth. Just to be reasonable enough and have some love and some caring and survive financially. That's about what it amounts to.

Dr. Perls: Change roles now!

A. B.: [As top dog] But that isn't all there is, that's what you say. You've got to involve yourself in something at this point. You can't stand back anymore and just sit around. O.K. Your want to involve yourself - do it. It's not such a hard thing to do. There are thousands of things going on out there. You have all kinds of ways to involve yourself. Do it and see what happens.

Dr. Perls: You seem to begin to experience something.

A. B.: I am. The experience is that I'm making a conflict when there really doesn't have to be one for me at this point. I'm manufacturing the conflict.

Dr. Perls: I see. Well, let's see how we can solve this and go on nagging, and nudging and hear this underdog ...

A. B.: [As top dog] All right. Do it. Do it. Do it. Stand up and do it. The devil take the hindmost, you know. You've got to put the past out of your mind. Whatever happened, happened. And you've got to go on to something else. That's all. It's time to go on. It's time to go through that goddamned impasse. You've been up to it forty times. You've had a million experiences. Go through it. You know. You know more than half those people that were on stage yesterday. You understood Fritz Perls. Very well. Very well. You understood the whole thing. You wouldn't have five years ago. O.K. F-you. F-you. F-you.

Dr. Perls: [Underdog] How dare you say a thing like this to me?

A. B.: [Underdog] How dare you say a thing like this to me? I am in charge of you. I'm gonna sit around for the next thirty years and I'm just gonna feel sorry for myself and I'm not gonna do anything. And don't you tell me what to do. Don't tell me.

I got the roles mixed up. I got mixed up.

Dr. Perls: Because the roles are mixed.

A. B.: That's right. I don't want to do anything. Parts of this beautiful zest for life that I had, it's gone away and I keep reaching to find it again, and I can't find it. And I don't know what the spark is what would make me come alive again.

Dr. Perls: Good.

A. B.: I don't know. I don't give a shit about the ego. I don't know.

Dr. Perls: Go back to the seat. Do it one more time.

A. B.: All right. F-you. F-you.

Dr. Perls: Put your voice in the chair. You talk to your voice.

A. B.: Put my voice in that chair ...? My voice is beautiful. I did a radio show at one time. You are a beautiful voice. You are alive, you are interesting. It's a beautiful. low. intelligent ... It's a voice that reflects background, and breeding. It's an excellent voice. And not only that, it's carried you very far in this kind of voice with people, it immediately commands something. People listen to you because it has this quality ... [changing]

The voice is controlled ...

Dr. Perls: I am controlled.

A. B.: I am controlled. I am the voice, and the voice ...

Dr. Perls: I am the voice.

A. B.: Oh, I am. I am the voice, right?

Dr. Perls: You be your voice.

A. B.: I am controlled. I know I'm playing this role. I know I'm able to do it. I delight in it. I know what I can do with you, my voice. I know just how to use it for what I want, when I want to. No ...?

Dr. Perls: You're not becoming your voice. I am controlling your, charming you ...

A. B.: I'm controlling your.

Dr. Perls: Charming you.

A. B.: I'm charming your. I'm keeping you unreal in a way. I keep you away from the real me because I've been such a good weapon for your all your life. I've been a way of controlling your anger, you know. I've been a way of helping you get what you want at the same time. I'm good at it. I'm good at this. I really am.

Dr. Perls: Let's try this. I'm the greatest manipulator ...

A. B.: Oh. I'm the greatest manipulator on earth. But I gotta be right here. I'm the lousiest manipulator on earth because everyone sees through my manipulations after a while. In the beginning they don't, but then they see right through it. And I think I can play a game that nobody else recognises, but they see me. They see me. And I don't realize they see me. That's the stupid part.

Dr. Perls: Don't change your voice.

A. B.: Woe is me. Woe is me. Woe is me. Woe is me. Woe is me. And cut out the stupidity of self-pitty. Woe is me.

Dr. Perls: More pity, more.

A. B.: Adelaide, I feel sorry for your, but, umm ...

Dr. Perls: Be very sorry.

A. B.: I feel sorry for your and I feel sorry because God gave your a lot and your just haven't brought it all together yet. You just really haven't. Your really haven't. I feel sorry for you because you can't stand up. Oh, you have stood up a lot, but you could do it more.

Dr. Perls: What do you hear?

A. B.: A little girl pleading.



Dr. Perls: What age?

A. B.: I always come to nine. there was something at nine.

Dr. Perls: Again ...

A. B.: Oh, I'm sorry for you, Adelaide, 'cause of that stupid family, and all the screaming in my ears. They ruined my ears. I couldn't listen. So I shut myself away and my ears. But it's time to open your ears now. 'Cause nobody's screaming anymore. an to hang on to your childhood is such a bore. It is such a bore. And I am so tired of thinking about it. It really doesn't interest me. If it really doesn't interest you anymore, then all your have to do is open your ears and listen. That's all there is to it. Just listen. Listen to the world. Listen to the music. And listen. Maybe that's all there is to it.

Dr. Perls: Change the dialogue to your ears.

A. B.: My ears. These ears are ... my ears are closed. I am my ears and I'm all closed and I don't listen. I shut it all out. I don't want to listen. I'm hearing only one thing. I'm only hearing that terrible screaming. All that screaming ... All those horrible, hideous people in my family with the exception of that beautiful father. Could I listen to him? No, I couldn't listen to anybody.

Dr. Perls: Your father?

A. B.: He was pathetic, but nice.

Dr. Perls: Talk to him.

A. B.: I wish I'd loved you more when you were here. You were a sweet man, a very intelligent man, an a learned man - and I didn't listen to you. I didn't listen to you at all. I'd like to. If only my kids could listen to you. They don't have any father to listen to. They have a whole different environment.

Dr. Perls: What do you hear?

A. B.: A mixture. I hear a mixture of him and a mixture of the screaming-both.

Dr. Perls: What do you hear?

A. B.: I hear the tape recorder going on and on. That's what I hear. *I got something new out of it. I heard a whole new thing that I'd never gotten, Fritz. A credit to you and all the stuff. I got a whole thing about listening I'd never gotten before. A whole feeling about opening my ears.*

Dr. Perls: What do you hear?

A. B.: What do I hear? *I hear myself wanting to listen.*

Dr. Perls: You do not have ears yet?

A. B.: I have no ears yet? I'm on the road, though, an I ... and people are always saying to me, "But your don't listen to me. Your didn't hear what I said."

Dr. Perls: Shut up.

A. B.: Shut up. All right. I hear him pleading with me, my father, to listen to me.

Dr. Perls: What do you hear now?

A. B.: Emptiness.

Dr. Perls: Now ...

A. B.: I hear the tape recorder. I hear you. Aha. Aha. I got it. I hear *what is. I hear what is now.*

Dr. Perls: More ...

A. B.: What i hear is the sound of the people in the hall. I hear you. I hear the tape recorder. I hear the air conditioner.

Dr. Perls: What do you hear?

A. B.: That's right. I hear what is now.

Dr. Perls: You need to use your ears.

A. B.: Because I got a whole new way that came over me in terms of listening. I hear myself and my voice is still out there. My voice is ... I feel this reality inside of me which I felt for a long time. But my voice doesn't convey ... this doesn't convey what I want to sax out here. Therein lies the dichotomy.

Dr. Perls: The hearing and the saying.

A. B.: Now. see, that's ... the one thing about hearing is-shall I tell you? I don't even remember now what I've said as the captain.

Dr. Perls: So you need the tape recorder.

A. B.: That's right. I don't take in. I don't take in.

Dr. Perls: No, you do not absorb.

A. B.: But, angel, I didn't really ... you know I've got to say this to you ... I really didn't come for this interview to do this.

Dr. Perls: Aaaaah ...

A. B.: Did you know? I mean that's not what I came for.

Dr. Perls: That's just excuses.

A. B.: That's just excuses.

Dr. Perls: I've been a hundred times through this.

A. B.: That's not what I ... no. Could we go on? Please? Pretty please? Oh, women are allowed to get what they want, aren't they? No? Please? I want to. If not, the interview I had planned, I'll have to make it up.

Dr. Perls: No.

A. B.: I'll put in what you said at the lecture about "wiping your own ass is a sign of maturity." I got a whole dimension. But the thing is without all the living that I'd done up to now, I wouldn't have it. You know what I mean?

Dr. Perls: I do know what you mean.

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### **Biographical note about Adelaide Bry**

**(by Max Gartenberg, Literary Agent)**

Adelaide Bry was a writer interested in the various ways psychotherapists approached the healing of minds, and in sharing this interest with general readers.

In her book "Inside Psychotherapy" (where this interview with Fritz Perls was published for the first time) she interviewed nine leading clinicians of different schools).

Among her other books were two on transactional analysis, "The T. A. Primer" and "T. A. Games" and "A Primer of Behavioral Psychology".



### **Gestalt Critique**

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