

**As part of Lynne Jacobs' visit to IDeT, scheduled for April 2021, Vincent Béja conducted this interview.**

**We ask our readers that any reproduction, in whole or in part, of this text on their part, make explicit mention of the following reference:**

Jacobs, L., Béja, V. (2019), Interview with Lynne Jacobs. <https://www.idet.paris/interview-avec-lynne-jacobs>

**- Vincent: Hello Lynne. You're well known in the international gestalt community, but probably less well known by our French colleagues. I think you've only been to France once, at the invitation of Jean Marie Robine, almost twenty years ago. Can you introduce yourself in a few words by telling us where you come from and what are your main interests?**

**- Lynne:** I grew up in racially segregated suburbs near our nation's capital, Washington, D.C. I was born in 1950, while segregation was still legal in many parts of the U.S. I came of age during our civil rights era, and that has affected me profoundly. I write and teach on the meaning of "whiteness" in the U.S.

What else can I tell you about me that matters? Well, I have lived in the Los Angeles, California area since I came here to go to graduate school in clinical psychology in 1972. It was hard to leave my family—I have 4 siblings and love to spend time with them—but I fell in love with LA immediately upon arrival. I still love living here, where, since I live very close to the ocean, I run and walk along cliffs overlooking the beach several times a week.

I met my husband in 1982. He was a Japanese history professor for many years. Now he is a psychoanalyst. Aside from my love of my work—therapy, teaching, supervision, some writing—I played softball (like baseball) for 25 years after I moved to LA. I had to stop when my hands became arthritic. I also enjoy bike-riding. In fact, once my husband and I rode our bikes across the Canadian Rocky Mountains, and we are very proud of that!

Living in the U.S. I feel sad, angry and frightened and demoralized quite often. People are tense, dispirited, angry. Our president and his corrupt staff are nearly breaking our democracy, and I don't have to tell you how disruptive and dangerous he is to all countries, and to the environmental health of our planet.

**- Vincent: How did you come to psychotherapy and, especially, of course, to Gestalt therapy?**

**- Lynne:** Are there any among us who do not have trauma in our lives? It is almost a cliché. But I am not sure trauma is my main reason for becoming a therapist. Certainly my experience with suffering has been a resource. When I was in grade school, and even in early college, I thought I would be a history teacher. I enjoy studying history. But I wanted to be the kind of teacher that students would want to talk to on a personal level. I had been very nourished by conversations with

teachers who cared about me. I didn't really even know that such a thing as psychotherapy existed, I just knew that I thrived on intimate conversation. There is an aesthetic equality to intimate conversation that always attracts me.

In college, I fell in love with a psychologist I met. He introduced me to the world of therapy, and recommended that I volunteer at a local clinic. I co-led a therapy group with a local psychiatrist. IT was only then that I realized that the world of psychotherapy would be my home. I was like a fish finding water! In my last year of college, this same man introduced me to Gestalt Therapy Verbatim. I knew immediately that when I could afford to pay for therapy, I would choose a gestalt therapist. Both of my parents were emotionally distant, and growing up in the family left me hungry for a therapeutic experience in which the therapist was willing to be a person, someone with whom I could have the intimate conversations that breathed life into my somewhat deadened soul. So my attraction to gestalt therapy is defiantly it's emotional, here-now process, coupled with an appreciation of dialogical presence.

I offer here a few paragraphs from a short discussion I gave at the AAGT/EAGT:

*"I know that for many people their first acquaintance with Gestalt therapy was a form of grand activity and show. But my first acquaintance was with subtle musical, dance-like interplay between therapist and patient. The experience of "truth-telling" is a sensory experience that one feels in the muscles of one's face, in one's breathing, in the expansion in one's diaphragm, in one's growing freedom movement in the moment. therapeutic communication, even when profound suffering enshrouds us, has a beauty that transcends the pain without obliterating the pain. So, what first drew me to Gestalt Therapy was the beauty of meaningful dialogue—which always means an Other, of course, as all contacting does--, the being-with, and it remains one of my strongest supports for putting my heart at risk.*

*The second, which is an aspect of the dialogic attitude, is the Gestalt therapy emphasis on presence. Joseph Zinker wrote a lovely essay in the first year of the publication of the Gestalt review entitled, "Presence As Evocative Power in Therapy." His description made clear how the ethic and aesthetic of presence were intertwined. As with what I was saying about the surrender to dialogue, Zinker says of presence that it "stimulates unknown parts of oneself, parts not yet fully sensed, described or named as awarenesses. Another's presence makes me feel my own being-here, my own validity. Presence is generally empowering." He describes qualities of presence in sensate terms: deep full and even breathing, a sense of being grounded, diffuse attentiveness, readiness to respond, something like Friedlander's zero point. Sitting with someone's presence, as Zinker writes: "I feel free to express myself, to be myself, to reveal any tender, vulnerable parts, to trust that I will be received without judgment or evaluation."*

*Being in the presence of presence is, dare I say, miraculous. My professional interests have been shaped a long (and blessedly successful) struggle to overcome a pervasive sense of isolation and emotional disconnection in my life. My struggle to come out of isolation and to allow intimacy, to touch and be touched, dominated my early years as a patient. In fact, my initial (and current) attraction to the world of gestalt therapy is that the experience of the therapist's presence offered some hope for salvation from own emotional impoverishment and isolation. "*

In 1991 I began studying to become a psychoanalyst after meeting Robert Stolorow, whose Intersubjective Systems Theory has an epistemology that is very congenial with gestalt therapy. And he teaches finely attuned listening, which has enhanced my therapeutic work. I loved my study, I enjoy my psychoanalytic community, although gestalt therapy is still my home. I will be glad to speak more about how I "marry" my two worlds if you people are interested when I come to Paris.

**- Vincent: In 1995 you published a book with Rich Hycner: "The Healing Relationship in Gestalt Therapy: A dialogic, Self-Psychology Approach". This book clearly and explicitly placed Gestalt Therapy in a relational perspective. Can you tell us how this book was born and how it was received, both within the gestalt community and outside?**

**Lynne:** When I began therapy (as a patient), I chose Gary Yontef because he had written an article of two in which he emphasized contacting between the therapist and the patient, and one of his first articles, he spoke of I-Thou. I knew I wanted to be in therapy with someone who valued paying attention to the relationship in therapy. I very much wanted a therapist who cared about how I experienced our therapeutic dialogue. In our work together, we paid close attention to how I experienced being with him, and actually our work together influenced both of us to want to explore the function of the relationship in therapy.

I was working towards my doctorate at the time, so I chose to write a theoretical paper on the centrality and the function of the relationship in gestalt therapy, and I also attempted to integrate Buber's ideas on dialogue. The paper was ultimately published in The Gestalt Journal. By this time, Rich Hycner and I had become acquainted through our shared interests in Buber and gestalt therapy.

For me, the relationship has always been central in ANY therapy that is meaningful. So, after my first article was published, I continued to explore and elaborate on that central theme, and that is how I became interested in contemporary psychoanalysis, which places central emphasis on the relationship. Eventually, Rich asked me to send him the articles I had written, and he offered to write companion

chapters and create a book with his ideas and mine (it never would have occurred to me to write a book, so I am grateful to Rich!).

The book was very well received in England and Australia and in parts of the US. Also, when I have travelled elsewhere, I hear from students that some of them have read it. I do not believe it is known outside the gestalt community at all. I think it has been somewhat controversial in some places in the USA, since I did not use a lot of the terminology from PHG. But whether or not it is widely read, it was important for naming and focussing our attention on the centrality of the relationship, and that idea is now widely accepted.

**- Vincent: There is now a growing interest in research in our community. It pushes us to open ourselves to the whole field of psychotherapy. The therapist's ability to be fully engaged with his client and to respond sensitively to him becomes one of the main topics for research and training. How do you see the future of Gestalt therapy? Will it become a branch of contemporary psychoanalysis? What is your wish for our therapeutic modality and our Gestalt community?**

**- Lynne:** I think this is a difficult question to address! I am have never been very good at imagining my own future, much less the future for anything else. I have always been skeptical of psychotherapy research. I live in dread of having the aesthetics of therapy—which is akin to aesthetics of life!—being robbed of its vital indeterminacy by being subjected to research. However, the new paradigms that Brownell and other gestalt therapists are pioneering are more tolerable to me, sometimes even exciting.

As regards the future of gestalt therapy, sometimes I think our future does not matter as long as our fundamental “bones” live on, incorporated well into another theory. However, as I continue to be exposed to other ways of therapy, I have become convinced that I prefer we go the other way around. Our theory is so comprehensive, and it's implications for practice so open, that I would rather that other be drawn into GT.

What do I predict? I am not optimistic about a robust future in USA, because we have few gestalt therapists who are willing to teach at universities here. I am more optimistic about other countries in which the paths to becoming a therapist (and then a gestalt therapist), are different.

**- Vincent: Thank you very much Lynne... and see you soon at IDeT!**