

## BOOK REVIEWS

Adam Kincl. *Exploring Masculinity, Sexuality, and Culture in Gestalt Therapy: An Autoethnography*. Routledge, 2021.

Adam Kincl is a UK-based clinician, teacher, and researcher. His book *Exploring Masculinity, Sexuality, and Culture in Gestalt Therapy* contributes a unique integration of new research methodology (autoethnography), new philosophical influences (especially the work of Barad 2007), new concepts (such as collective gestalts), and new growth methodologies (such as working with large group experience to create dialogue around prejudice and hatred). His book is substantial in its breadth and depth and contains multiple layers of meaning and content. Kincl approaches his research and practice from a field-oriented, phenomenological perspective. Among his philosophical influences are the onto-epistemology of Barad, the phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau Ponty, the existentialism of Buber, and the dialogical approach of Gadamer.

Key to Kincl's integration is quantum physicist Barad's (2007) concept of "agential intra-action." Barad views phenomena from the perspective of "practice and actions." Through the lens of practice and actions, we are simultaneously embedded in, and separate from, the relational matrix within which we exist. We are both connected and separate. This is a profoundly dialogical stance in which *relationships*—those between humans, those between humans and the natural world, and those that exist outside of human experience in the natural world—are at the core of reality. Barad's is a *process* orientation in which all matter is interconnected, and those interconnections are at the heart of existence.

In Kincl's method, when a researcher studies phenomena in which they are embedded, for example, sexuality or culture, such research

cannot be approached from the outside. Instead, the researcher endeavors to apply the discipline of creating separability or exteriority from within phenomena. Throughout this book, Kincel approaches his subjects concurrently from within and with exteriority. He is the observer and the observed, the one who acts and the one who is acted upon. Thus, his Gestalt therapy research is both highly personal and aimed broadly. The methodology he employs is "auto-ethnography."

Kincel explains that "auto-ethnography is a research methodology that focuses on personal memory as a valid source of knowledge" (114). In his analysis of masculinity, sexuality, and culture, he utilizes the tools of auto-ethnography, bringing forth his own experiences and personal narratives. He then uses ethnographic methodologies, such as interviews with family members, to situate his personal narrative in a field context, so that his personal experience helps illuminate our understanding of the constellation of issues being investigated: the development of sexuality, masculinity, and heteronormativity in the author's cultural context, together with an exploration of the ways in which these issues are currently worked in Gestalt therapy. Along the way, he engages in valuable discussions related to the practice of Gestalt therapy. Among the many issues he addresses are: large group work, the use of touch in the therapy, homophobia as it shows up in the work, the clinical impact of a more directive approach versus the impact of a relational Gestalt approach, and the embodied experience of culture in Gestalt therapy practice.

Importantly, Kincel positions his Gestalt method in the social and political. Early in the book, he introduces the term "collective gestalts." As I understand it, collective gestalts relate to the identifications, introjects, and internalizations that we embody as a result of our connection to larger groups, such as national or ethnic groups. Here is Kincel's concise definition: "A collective gestalt is an embodiment of social, political and cultural experiences through personal experiences. Defined in this way it can also include memories passed through generations" (19). Since being introduced to the concept of collective gestalts, I am finding that my clinical work has been enriched with new explorations of issues, such as culture, national and ethnic identity, and intergenerational trauma.

Kincel's approach makes for fascinating and exciting reading: he shares with the reader intimate and engagingly personal stories. Beyond just the stories, Kincel shares deeply and courageously of his history, his

family of origin, his sexual development and identity, his childhood in communist Poland, his personal psychotherapy, and his Gestalt training. What we get is both personal and social history. He shares stories that represent distinct areas of his development: his sexual development, the development of how he holds and expresses his masculinity, the development of his cultural identity, and his development as a Gestalt therapist. All of these narratives intersect and impact one another and become part of the greater whole: a story of emergence, growth, and maturation.

*Exploring Masculinity, Sexuality and Culture in Gestalt Therapy* marks the arrival of a major new voice in the Gestalt therapy literature. Kincl places himself squarely in Gestalt therapy's intellectual and clinical practice traditions, weighing in on issues that have been central concerns of Gestalt therapy since its inception, such as the intersection of the personal and political, the impact of cultural and familial introjects, and body and sexual awareness. In these areas and many more, Kincl broadens our palette by introducing new ideas and influences. The reader is brought into the emergence of a deeply thoughtful, fully committed, keenly courageous Gestalt therapist who has profoundly integrated Gestalt's literature and methodology, and who opens our eyes to exciting new pathways for our collective development.

Peter Cole, LCSW

peterhayscole@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.5325/gestaltreview.27.2.0188>

## REFERENCE

Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Miriam Taylor. *Deepening Trauma Practice: A Gestalt Approach to Ecology and Ethics*. Open University Press, 2021.

Miriam Taylor's latest book was published during a time of global pandemic, climate emergency, cultural conflict, and resource inequality, so it is both timely and apposite. It is best read as a follow-up to her