

Original Contributions - Originalbeiträge

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Gestalt Theory and Morphology: Linking Points, Lines of Development, and Areas of Focus

Gestalt theory and morphology are concepts of Gestalt psychology that emerged at different times in different places in Germany. Gestalt theory was developed between approximately 1910 and 1933 by Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, Kurt Koffka, Kurt Lewin and others in Frankfurt and Berlin as a new and original concept for the classic questions of academic psychology (Ash, 1995). Morphological psychology or psychological morphology – both terms are commonly used but will be referred to briefly as *morphology* in the following – is based not only on Gestalt psychology but also on phenomenological and depth psychology principles, and was founded by Wilhelm Salber in the late 1950s at the universities of Cologne and Würzburg (Fitzek, 2019). Unlike Gestalt theory, morphology has not become known worldwide, but it is widespread in Germany among cultural psychology concepts and is particularly recognised for its practical application in market and media impact research. Publications on morphology are rare among Gestalt theorists, while there exist several publications on Gestalt theory from scholars identifying with the Salber school. In the following comments, I will refer less to the well-known original texts on Gestalt theory than to the corresponding passages in my publications on this subject (Fitzek, 2014; Fitzek & Salber, 1996).

To clarify the relationship between Gestalt Theory and morphology, I will briefly address Gestalt Theory impulses to better trace the lines of development and areas of focus of the morphological concept as they relate to Gestalt Theory. Each of the eight chapters of my article opens with an idea from Gestalt theory that became important for morphology (sub-section 1). To this end, I first quote from Wertheimer's famous speech *Über Gestalttheorie* (Wertheimer, 1925/1985) and later discuss the implications of Kurt Lewin's field model. This is followed by sub-point 2, which provides a suitable transition to the concept of morphology. In a third sub-chapter, I refer to those articles in this issue that can be directly related to the point in question. At the end of each chapter, I develop the respective content aspect (as sub-point 4) in a continuous example, Tom Hooper's award-winning feature film *The King's Speech* (2010), which deals with the fate of the English monarch George VI.

1. The richness of the moment

1.1 A hundred years ago, the *Berlin School of Gestalt Theory* was one of the world's most renowned psychological university institutes. Its reputation extended far beyond the Friedrich-Wilhelms-University and earned its members numerous invitations to present the findings of Gestalt psychology to the scientific community. On 17 December 1924, Max Wertheimer gave a lecture for the Kant Society, which was later published in a philosophical journal and succinctly formulated the programmatic starting point of Berlin Gestalt theory:

What is Gestalt theory, and what does it aim to achieve? ... One starts from some powerful living force that has taken place within oneself, looks up what psychology and science have to say about these things, reads and reads (or begins to research in the manner that has been customary for a long time) and afterwards has the clear feeling: one has a lot in one's hands and yet actually nothing. Somehow, what seemed to be the most important, the most essential, the most vital aspect of the matter has been lost in these processes (Wertheimer, 1925/1985, p. 99, own translation).

Gestalt theory did not arise in a vacuum, but as a response to the narrowing of academic psychology that resulted from its adaptation to the natural sciences (Ash, 1995). After scientific psychology had entered the universities towards the end of the 19th century, the experimental practice of the natural sciences prevailed there and concentrated psychological research on questions that could be answered precisely by means of measurements, but which were detached from everyday life – perceptual illusions, colour sensations or word associations.

In the Gestalt theorists' point of view, the "essential" and "most vivid" aspects of psychological experience were revealed not by focusing on elementary stimuli and responses only, but by widening the perspective on connections, transitions and (Gestalt) qualities (as in Wertheimer's so-called phi phenomenon or the Gestalt switch of ambivalent figures; cf. Fitzek & Salber, 1996, p. 27). The contextuality of experience became all the more apparent when it happens outside the laboratory in the scenarios of real life, as Wertheimer showed in his lecture on thinking and problem solving:

Who has not experienced what it means when a student understands something? Who has not experienced for themselves how such understanding takes place when, for example, a mathematical connection suddenly becomes clear for the first time... (Wertheimer, 1925/1985, p. 99, own translation).

1.2 Transitions and twists and turns are also the starting point for morphological visual experience. Like Gestalt theorists, Wilhelm Salber, as an academically trained psychologist, initially also started from perceptions and thought experiments.

However, for him, the “essential” and “most vivid” only became apparent when he was able to trace the complexity of experience in an everyday context (Salber, 1965/2009). Thus, perception becomes meaningful in the context of advertising, film and art. Thinking unfolds in search actions and solving processes.

For morphology, wholeness and Gestalt are indications of a coherent, at the same time extremely versatile organisation of everyday reality. In everyday life subjects do not experience isolated perceptual figures and thought puzzles, but rather the meaningful connections of the mundane run in all their complexity and diversity: the rituals of life at home, work processes, leisure activities, film, art, sport, dreams. Everyday occupations find meaning and direction through what fits together concretely, what blends in, picks up on other things, continues them, takes them further in the same direction or reverses them into their opposite. These are the morphological Gestalt laws of everyday life (Salber, 1989, p. 63).

This shaping and reshaping organises the daily routine, makes people happy or unhappy, captivates or repels them, makes them addicted or causes them to flee. It can lead to endless repetition and running on empty, fascinates with its often bizarre character, frightens, scares or causes despair. Joining, continuing, rubbing, breaking up and drifting apart dominate everyday life. Every moment is filled with an immense richness of expressive tendencies. Salber therefore liked to emphasise the double sense of German *Alltag* (everyday life) and *All-Tag* (universal day) (1989, p. 11; cf. Fitzek, 2024a, p. 102).

1.3 The abundance of the moment is the fundamental experience of morphology. Often only superficially concealed, its apparent banality hides the profundity and inscrutability of human conditions in every moment. Occasionally, it becomes apparent that every moment of life can be elevated to immeasurable happiness and at the same time threatened by a sudden fall into chaos and destruction. Even moments that are less significant in terms of life have complex dimensions of meaning when they are questioned from a psychological perspective. Salber noticed this phenomenon early on in the context of film and advertising (Fitzek & Salber, 1996, p. 117). Morphological market- and media research therefore works with stretching short sequences of experiences to decipher their multi-layered structure. Hinterding and Giebel are currently working on the images used in advertising spots and show that clips lasting only a few seconds can resonate deeply psychologically (Hinterding & Giebel, 2025). Similarly, morphological media studies have shown how trailers and opening sequences lasting only a few seconds become crucial key stimuli for film experience (Blothner, 1999, p. 147).

1.4 Tom Hooper provides a striking example of the richness of the moment in the opening sequence of his film *The King's Speech*: a moment that is as agonisingly

prolonged for thousands of spectators in a packed football stadium as it is for the unsuspecting film audience. The viewers see an impressive-looking keynote speaker in front of many thousands of people at the opening of an agricultural machinery exhibition in 1920s London. He is in the focus of the camera, his voice booming loudly. But only fragments of words and choking sounds come out of the mouth of the dignified speaker as he steps up to the microphone. The viewers in the film and in the cinema become witnesses to a communication disaster. Although the text of the speech is trivial and could apparently be read effortlessly from the page, the interruptions, slips of the tongue and involuntary pauses make the speech an almost unbearable fiasco. Why on earth is this man stuttering?

We learn (or already know) that the speaker is of royal descent and that his role was not earned through qualification, but rather by birth. The stuttering is therefore a matter of state and, as further scenes show, is combated by the royal court with draconian measures and helpless advice (smoke more!). A speechless keynote speaker - hard to believe if you don't know the historical background. That alone is enough material for a human drama. The award-winning film succeeds in shaping it into a powerful epic whose artful structure – at least implicitly – serves as an example of the morphological concept of how profundity and inscrutability can dominate the moment. The main character of the following 90 minutes is not the speaker, but the fate of a state-bearing inhibition and its resistant treatment. The film centres on the royal prince's encounter with an outsider who at first appears extremely awkward but gradually sets out to cure his stutter.

2. Action units are shaped out of the moment

2.1 Primary interest in the natural sciences led 19th-century psychology to focus on isolated stimuli and responses, within which experience and behaviour had to be pieced together. Gestalt psychologists considered this a fundamentally wrong approach to psychological reality:

The fundamental problem of Gestalt theory could be formulated as follows: There are relationships in which what happens in the whole is not derived from how the single pieces are and how they are put together, but rather the other way around, where, in a striking case, what happens to a part of this whole is determined by the internal structural laws of this whole (Wertheimer, 1925/1985, p. 101, own translation).

What is addressed as a 'whole' in this way of thinking is not composed of individual aspects – such as the psychophysical condition of human beings, neurological processes, cognitive events, social functions, personality traits. Rather, the 'whole' is what is shaped out of the (rich) moment as a Gestalt.

Gestalt is determined by qualities that are not based on the sum of details but rather characterise experience specifically as a whole: as ominous, gripping, fragile, threatened or devastating. However, such *Gestalt qualities* (Ehrenfels, 1890, as cited in FitzeK & Salber, 1996, p. 14) do not stand alone but exist in the context of the development of perceptual experiences, thought processes or learning actions. Gestalt qualities refer to developmental processes, as Wertheimer traced them in the drafts, solution trees and changes of direction of “productive thinking” (Wertheimer, 1945, as cited in FitzeK & Salber, 1996, p. 61).

Before Kurt Lewin developed his field theory (I will discuss this in the second part of my article, as announced at the beginning), he thought about human actions as *action wholes* (*Handlungsganzheiten*; Lewin, 1926, as cited in FitzeK & Salber, 1996, p. 93), in which he observed characteristic progression profiles and a variety of solution types: from planning and preliminary design, through introductory and implementation attempts, to the fulfilment and completion of intentions and action plans. Lewin originally assigned them to “volitional actions”. At the same time, they present a prototype of modelling extended units of experience and behaviour that could be applied to perceptual processes as well as to problem solving, work and leisure activities, children’s play, group processes and film experiences.

2.2 Based on the experience of the rich moment, and intellectually prepared by the aforementioned thinkers, it became essential for morphology to go beyond classic topics in psychology (see above: perception, thinking, volition) and describe the lived units that shape everyday life. On the basis of detailed in-depth interviews, it was possible to show the density of desires and needs for expression that are evoked, negotiated, regulated, and pushed aside in the seemingly banal activities of getting up, eating breakfast, cleaning, sunbathing, walking the dog (*cf.* Salber, 1989). They become psychological objects by occupying a place in the course of the day and orienting experience and behaviour over a period of time from a beginning to an end – without necessarily being present to the actor.

Wilhelm Salber saw the sequence patterns in the course of the day, in which the abundance of the moment is formed, as thoroughly prepared in Lewin’s concept of action wholes. In his book *Morphologie des seelischen Geschehens* (Salber, 1965/2009) he attempted to shape out even more precisely than Lewin which density of impacts is constituted in each case. Research on children’s play, watching films, listening to lessons, perceiving pieces of advertising and observing works of art were a promising start (*cf.* Salber, 1965/2009). In addition to these processes, which Salber referred to as *action units* (*Handlungseinheiten*), Salber established a second concept, *impact units* (*Wirkungseinheiten*; Salber, 1969/2007), which takes his idea into account that everyday life is at the

same time structured by timeless contexts: by brand images, by political items, media statements, by employment programmes and leisure time, by social interaction in families, associations and organisations, and by the written and unwritten rules of the economy, transport, private interaction and public life. From a morphological point of view, these too are shaped out of the moment; they too organise the profundity of experience into units with surface and depth, promise and risk, with points of stability and reversal.

In the research practice of morphology, those non-sequential impact units (*Wirkungseinheiten*; Salber, 1969/2007) soon took on the leading role and qualified morphology as a psychological approach to a multitude of questions. Methodically the Gestalt relationships of everyday life are researched through morphological in-depth interviews, in which the richness of the moment is stretched, weighed down and turned around together in the interview process, in which seemingly incidental aspects or “coincidences” often provide essential insight into what holds the impact unit together (Salber, 2007, p. 245).

2.3 Films are a good example of the richness of experience that can occur in mundane stories. It is apparent that successful feature films, even though fictional plots are played out, achieve a greater effect on the audience than “real” events. Thus, Salber was initially interested in films as prime examples of action units, which led to analysis of the immediate sequence of experiences. From there, he developed the concept of “complex development”. However, nowadays, morphological studies go beyond this, addressing issues dealt with in films that transcend the scene-to-scene process – whether in the fates of individual characters, or manifestations of contemporary culture (in the sense of impact units). In his contribution to the journal, Zwingmann provides an overview of the scope of morphological media psychology; at the same time, he treats a single film (*Air* by Ben Affleck) as an impact unit concerning the fate of a sport shoe (Zwingmann, 2025). In contrast, Hodde focuses on the action unit of a film and presents the complex development in Polanski’s *God of Carnage* (Hodde, 2025).

2.4 In order to decipher *The King’s Speech* in terms of an action unit, it would be necessary to analyse in-depth interviews with film viewers scene by scene. At this point, however, the focus should be on the form taken by the life story of the (stuttering) English King George VI and his encounter with the unorthodox Australian speech therapist Lionel Logue in the film. This impact unit is designed with cinematic means almost as if it were waiting for a morphological analysis. It presents a script that shows the king’s biography under pressure of the court and political events, and his encounter with a non-conformist spirit (Logue), who may provide salvation.

After the speech fails to get off the ground, we are immersed in the world of the royal family, which is surrounded not only by the doctors who are trying to help, but also by a multitude of nobles, favourites and servants. It becomes clear what functions the members of the royal family have to fulfil and that they perform their representative duties with varying degrees of talent and commitment. It quickly becomes apparent that the familiar etiquette is being challenged by global political and media developments, as exemplified by the worldwide presence of the royal voice in the new medium of radio, to which the old king submits with chivalrous discipline. He expects his second-born son to overcome his foolish inhibitions: what does it mean to read a few lines from a sheet of paper in front of an inconspicuous recording device?

The film's impact unit opens a window to the world outside the castle walls (only) into the rather dreary household of Australian amateur actor Lionel Logue, who keeps his family afloat with speech therapy and dreams in vain of a theatre career. Who wants to see an elderly Hamlet with an Australian accent on stage in Shakespeare-influenced London? The strands of the royal palace and the basement flat run parallel for a while, but it soon becomes clear that they will come together in the long run. It is part of the art form of film that the rapprochement between the royal patient and the speech therapy outsider does not proceed smoothly and only goes on with resistance.

3. Formation as self-treatment of reality

- 3.1 Human beings face a field, and what happens in that field depends here and now on one of the most beautiful parts of this work essentially has to do with the fact that the field tends to become meaningful, become unified, be governed by inner necessity, and that one often has to use astonishingly strong means to destroy a field tending towards meaningfulness or to force another form upon it (Wertheimer 1925/1985, p. 105, own translation).

Discovering the abundance of the moment in contexts of action and impact could become a difficult task to grasp – the Gestalt psychologists were already aware of this. They countered this with the revolutionary idea that behaviour in all its varieties follows the developmental logic of forms. Experience and behaviour do not have a Gestalt character in addition to their other properties; they are organised exclusively and thoroughly in terms of Gestalt.

According to this theory, all actions are governed by a dynamic that follows the logic of Gestalt formation, with a universal tendency towards the meaningful fulfilment of forms at the top of the hierarchy. This tendency towards good Gestalt was formulated by Wertheimer as a law, the *Prägnanzgesetz* (cf. Fitzek, 2014, p. 3). In Gestalt theory, it applies equally to perception, problem solving and learning and encompasses the tendencies inherent in every psychological event

towards uniformity and closure, towards completion, towards continuation (in a similar direction), towards dissolution (without residue).

Köhler's experiments with anthropoids on Tenerife showed what psychology can tendentially disregard in problem solving (e.g. cognitive abilities and physiological conditions) and what enormous practical benefits are associated with concentrating on the psychology of gaining concise Gestalt formations: the creation of learnable and transferable coping strategies for tasks of all kinds. On the other hand, it is less often recognised that not only the wonders of intelligence (even in animals) but also mistakes and errors are due to the logic of forms. "Productive thinking" does not occur, for example, when "good" solutions dominate and prevent the opportunity for rethinking and realignment (Köhler, 1917, cf. Fitzek & Salber, 1996, p. 42).

3.2 Salber followed Gestalt theory in seeing the tendency towards "good Gestalt" as effective in everyday life as well. Everyday life also holds together through closure, continuation and the orientation of actions towards a coherent end (Salber, 1965/2009, p. 99). However, the explicit reference of morphology to Goethe's theory of metamorphosis also points to tendencies towards turns and twists; and freely adapted from Faust: *Gestaltung, Umgestaltung, des ew'gen Sinnes ew'ge Unterhaltung* (Formation, transformation, eternal sense's eternal entertainment, own translation). The formative character of experience encompasses, from the visionary idea of morphology, both formation and transformation, the search for the proven form together with the countervailing tendency towards modification, towards becoming, towards metamorphosis.

According to Salber, the dynamics of formation and transformation are decisive for how the density of the moment is established from case to case in the (action and impact) units. Based on the assumption of opposing tendencies and the imperfection of all mediation, Salber developed the idea that mental processes are therefore constitutionally preoccupied with themselves and that the subject of morphology is consequently the "conversation of reality with itself" (Salber, 1989, p. 12). From a morphological point of view, all psychological subjects are variations of the self-treatment of reality in terms of form and transformation: as action units or impact units of everyday life, as human destinies (*Charakterentwicklung*) and the processing of destinies (*Intensivberatung*). The self-treatment of reality provides a provisional and never completely successful balance in these forms of life. For Salber, this activity is "cultivation"; its core is the "uneasiness" of all culture already captured in Freud's cultural psychology (Salber, 1987; Fitzek, 2024a, p. 104).

Deviating from Gestalt theory, Salber considers Gestalt problems to be key points in the cultivation of reality. In the cultivation forms of everyday life (activities,

events, works), they seek a balance between basic dimensions like *being and becoming*, *finitude and infinity* or *fullness and emptiness*. For Salber, these are existential problems of Gestalt and, at the same time, moving circumstances of self-treatment. Because they determine everyday events as a whole (*All-Tag*) as well as in detail (*Wirkungseinheiten*), everyday life is fundamentally not “grey” and its manifestations are anything but banal (Salber, 1989, p. 13; 2024a, p. 102). As examples, cleaning procedures are (proverbially) about (Gestalt) “purity”, smoking is about gaining (Gestalt) “height”, and fitness is about building a “good Gestalt” in a narrower and broader sense. Morphological research aims to discover core problems of Gestalt (trans-)formation in their phenomenon-oriented descriptions of everyday experiences.

3.3 The self-treatment of reality and its relationship to cultivation processes led Salber to the trail of a “concrete cultural psychology” (Salber, 1987; Fitzek, 2024a). It can be practised wherever cultures encounter each other, in national and regional cultures as well as in joke or dispute cultures, in the context of business psychology in product or brand cultures, and preferably also in organisational cultures. Corporate culture is only superficially represented by the way employees interact with each other and with the company’s property. In fact, every company launches cultivation projects with far-reaching and moving (Gestalt) dynamics. The articles by Mair and Warmuth in this issue provide insight into morphological research and consulting for private and public institutions. They trace corporate problems back to the conditions of self-treatment of reality and discuss examples of the cultivating power of formation and transformation on a theoretical basis and in practical application (Mair & Warmuth, 2025; Warmuth & Mair, 2025). By penetrating the moving relationships in corporate culture, the transition from analysis to counselling can also be achieved.

3.4 The fact that the film does not reveal an individual fate, but rather the cultivating power of an entire “company”, is demonstrated not only by the interweaving of the plot with the “firm” (as their relationship is called by the members of the royal family), but also by the merging of the fate of the stuttering prince with his (originally) hapless therapist. Initially hesitant and following the encouragement of his wife, the prince agrees to work with Logue and demands royal privileges as the price for his cooperation – after all, a prince is paying court to a penniless outsider. Logue is well aware of the honour, but insists on the conditions of a promising treatment culture (“my therapy, my practice, my rules”) – including appropriate cash payment (he advances the shilling due to the cashless prince).

The tentative beginning of their working alliance is already on the verge of collapse (it will not be the last), when a young patient appears and talks almost fluently about how much he has benefited from working with Logue. And

even though Bertie remains sceptical about the therapist's unorthodox methods (Logue has decided on his own authority to address the prince by his nick name, another affront that brings them close to breaking point), he increasingly enjoys the unexpected physical exercises and acting rehearsals, which by the way reveal a little-used talent for melodic swearing (without any stuttering whatsoever).

The modest progress quickly gains significance when a change of throne is announced: the dashing king falls ill, the heir to the throne (Bertie's older brother) does not want to give up his easy-going lifestyle and partnership with an American woman who is not of his social standing, and the stuttering prince and his staid wife are dismayed. Behind the scenes at court, resentment and jealousy reign – represented in the film by the scheming Archbishop of Canterbury. Added to this are developments in world history that darken the situation. In Germany, the National Socialists have seized power, and more than ever, Great Britain needs a decisive monarch.

The film artfully ties together the loose ends of royal disability, court etiquette, family tragedy, media development and world history into a package that generates a (Gestalt) dynamic of its own, increasingly captivating both the protagonists and the audience. For what was initially perceived as a personal impairment of the prince now threatens to become a handicap for world history. What if the new king, out of consideration for his dandyish lifestyle, passes the throne on to Bertie, and the rhetorical Mephisto from Nazi Germany is confronted in future by a stammering heap of misery? Under these circumstances, speech therapy seems like an indispensable measure on the path to a good (or better) Gestalt; in a literal sense, this involves the creation of conciseness, of closed forms with continuous curves and straight lines – in the service of the British Empire.

However, as with “productive thinking”, good intentions and hard work alone are not enough. And because circumstances are what they are, the speech therapy rescue of Britain is neither sudden nor continuous, but rather a painful process fraught with obstacles and setbacks. At some point, it all becomes too much for Bertie. After having to recite Shakespeare monologues to loud music as a test of his speech ability, without being able to hear himself speak (what an imposition for a member of the aristocracy!), he declares the experiment a failure and all practice superfluous. Upset, he turns his back on therapy and breaks off his work with Logue for the time being.

4. Formation and transformation rule the self-treatment of reality (not an individual “self”)

- 4.1 ...human beings are not merely part of a field, but are also part and members of the field together with other people. When people are together, for example in a particular job, then the most unnatural behaviour, which only occurs in late cases or in pathological cases, is that there are several egos together, but that these different egos work together, each as a meaningfully functioning part of the whole under normal circumstances (Wertheimer, 1925/1985, p. 109, own translation).

The Gestalt psychology approach breaks with a whole series of conventional premises of psychology: it does not focus on singular impressions, on experimental methods in the sense of the natural sciences and on their concentration on measurable effects. Nor does it take the position that psychology ultimately identifies the individual as the origin of his thoughts and actions and therefore has to clarify the functional characteristics of an acting subject. Additionally, Gestalt generally does not take place as an expression of a personal decision, but rather according to what is situationally required in the (densely filled) moment.

Gestalt theory is not primarily interested in the structural organisation of an ego, a person, the individual, but centres on the circumstances and requirements of the current field of impact (Fitzek & Salber, 1996, p. 93). Its main concern is to consistently identify all circumstances as conditions affecting this specific field. This means that stimuli, objects and attitudes are understood as possibilities and limitations of movement within the given field: as goals, boundaries, barriers, aids or resistance to the formation of Gestalt. In contrast, the emergence of an “I” only occurs in exceptional cases, for example when the smooth course of events appears to be disrupted and can only be changed through intervention or refocusing (Fitzek, 2000).

4.2 From a morphological perspective, the situation is very similar. Its subject matter is the self-treatment of reality, which gives form to the abundance of the moment in units of action and units of impact (Salber, 2007, p. 252). With this psychological “subject” (the self-treatment of reality) and its manifestations (the units composed as form and transformation), the familiar objects of psychology, such as subject, person, self and environment, become superfluous. Instead of thinking in terms of an individual’s cognitive, motivational and emotional constitution, morphology traces the processes of psychological cultivation in their special constellation of formation and transformation: What basic relationships of Gestalt characterises the shape of a particular action or impact unit (Salber, 1989, p. 12)?

The core of morphological analyses is therefore (trans-)formation itself, which negotiates its existential problems on a case-by-case basis (“Gestalten are therefore always forms in metamorphoses”; Salber, 2007, p. 250). Salber identifies various fundamental relationships between formation and transformation as the core of these problems: being and becoming different, binding and loosening, embracing and differentiating, the relationships of unity/multiplicity, banal/developed, finite/infinite and so on (Salber, 1989, p. 224). As a consequence, morphological research projects ultimately aim to assign the statements found in in-depth interviews regarding specific impact units to a special relation of formation and transformation.

In the various forms of cultivating reality, constant core problems of Gestalt can be identified, such as the problem of *repetition and departure* (e.g. at Christmas), *preservation and change* (e.g. on moving day), *moderation and letting go* (e.g. in fitness activities). Individuals respond to these essential problems of treating reality in different ways, but they are not the originators of the Gestalt relationships; rather, they often unconsciously take different positions on them. Exactly how the individual respondents relate to the specific Gestalt dynamics only becomes clear after the creation of a so-called unifying description of the in-depth interviews (Fitzek, 2024b, p. 243).

4.3 In morphology, the self-treatment of reality is not explored by clarifying individual adaptation efforts, but by uncovering fundamental patterns of formation and transformation. All research initially starts with the individual – whether in in-depth interviews for morphological research or in explorations with representatives of companies or organisations. However, the statements are unified with regard to the supra-individual structure of formation and transformation. In consulting processes, the (“acting”) individuals can only be understood with regard to the Gestalt dynamics of their living worlds. In the “joint work” of consultants and clients, the specific Gestalt structure gradually emerges from personal activities. This can be facilitated with aesthetic media. In this issue, Rosemarie Tüpker presents a traditional variant of morphological counselling, which she herself has played a key role in developing and which opens up the joint work through musical means (“morphological music therapy”; Tüpker, 2025). In addition, working with the reception of artworks (“art coaching”; cf. Fitzek, 2022) has become an established approach within morphologically informed coaching processes.

4.4 In the film, the struggle of the two main characters to regain the prince’s command of language becomes apparent as a joint work. What tends to take shape here is the meeting of two men who are unhappy in their jobs, who are hampered by overwhelming restrictions beyond their harmonious private lives,

and who, through their joint work against authority and resistance, free themselves to achieve a commendable performance.

The development of the film's form is not visibly attached to the characters of the prince and his therapist, but to the fact that a productive process develops between the different positions and characters. This keeps the two together, while at the same time the sacrifices necessary for this repeatedly plunge them into work crises. It is not only the intrinsic events of the treatment that ensure the (repeatedly hindered) progress of the undertaking, but also the course of world historical events. Only a few months after the death of the old king, the brother makes good on his threat to abdicate and leaves the throne to Bertie. Ironically, he announces his abdication in a polished speech broadcast worldwide on the radio. The second-born is now forced to continue working on himself and his speech impediment in the public eye.

The older brother took what was more important to him in a difficult hour of fate ("ego") than the course of world history. And Bertie? He functions and, despite his unmistakable reluctance, allows himself to be taken on board. In a fit of self-pity, he wants to confirm the futility of his efforts by listening to the recording of his Shakespeare recitation that Logue had given him as a memento of their work progress. To his utter amazement, Bertie hears himself speaking loudly and fluently for the first time in his life on this recording.

As Logue had predicted, stuttering is not a functional problem, but occurs the more the prince's "I" comes to the fore: not at all when speaking without an audience, only slightly when interacting with his immediate family, but unmistakably in public, especially in open exchanges ("Bbbbertie" had always been at a loss for words when faced with his big brother's accusations). Once he forgets his constrained position and his defiant struggle against it, he is able to speak without any restriction.

It is the tyranny of etiquette that has robbed the prince of his voice, and silence is the logical, albeit unconscious, response to the undeserved punishment. A cure would not be a solution to the royal predicament, but rather the final renunciation of what remains of his personal identity. Attempts at healing therefore logically provoke (unconscious) defence mechanisms as well as defiant outbursts of anger (ego breakthroughs). And unfortunately, paradoxically, these are not directed against social oppression, but against the beginnings of liberation (Logue).

After Bertie's coronation (as George VI), the success of the therapy is further threatened by the fact that it is now a king who, according to his therapist's instructions, slurs, babbles, stretches, groans and swears. In "egoistic" moments, the constrained figure repeatedly reaches for Bertie (George) for this reason. The ruler of an imperial world empire is supposed to engage in the antics of a miracle healer

whose references soon become obsolete in the face of the archbishop's cunning intrigues: Abort! The monarch decides once again and asserts his royal defensive ego against the silent promise that, with the help of a nameless but reliable figure, he might regain his voice in the long term after all.

Interim conclusion and transition

In the first four sections of this article, based on quotations from Wertheimer's speech to the Kant Society, it was shown that Gestalt theory and morphology are rooted in common psychological basic assumptions; it also became clear to what extent and in which areas the morphological concept has detached itself from the tradition of Gestalt theory. A similar approach will be taken in the following, when moving from theoretical foundations to methodological practice and referring to Lewin's field concept. It seems appropriate here not to go into the extensive literature on the field theory, but rather to reveal the different images that underlie the field concept (*cf.* Binder, 2023, for an overview of Lewin's field models). These images can be used to present the morphological method in its four "versions" of working out impact units.

Kurt Lewin had the most lasting effect of all the representatives of Gestalt theory, probably because he was comfortable with the American mentality, which he, like his colleagues, was exposed to in exile. Slightly younger than the others, he was not one of the early pioneers and sought to make Gestalt psychological thinking even more vivid and practical. He thus developed a "field theory" that very soon became field practice (Binder, 2023; Lück, 1996).

His proximity to methodological questions and his interest in practical applications are entirely in line with corresponding methodological assumptions in morphology. The *four versions of morphological description* (Fitzek, 2020, p. 715), which are common to all morphological research and consulting processes, can be easily developed out of the implications of Lewin's field model. Regardless of whether units of action or units of impact are analysed, in morphology each question is translated into a text through questioning and descriptive work with interview partners (in-depth interviews), which in turn addresses four aspects of the self-treatment of reality: the representation of a consistent basic quality, the identification of tensions, the highlighting of a central problem of (trans-)formation, and the characterisation of the types of solutions that operate with it (= 1st-4th version of the morphological description; Fitzek, 2020, p.715; Fitzek, 2024b, p. 243).

5. "Landscape" fields: sketching the phenomenology of basic qualities

5.1 One of the initial roots of Lewin's field model had direct biographical reasons; the outbreak of the First World War interrupted the early phase of his engagement

with academic psychology. Lewin was drafted into the Wehrmacht and served in a radio unit on the Western Front. Typical of Lewin, he used his life circumstances to make psychological observations, and thus Gestalt theory literally entered the field. This resulted in an essay that takes an explicitly “phenomenological” approach and starts from a comparison of landscapes in times of peace and war (Lewin, 1917, p. 440). The young psychologist Lewin was now literally “in the field” and was able to see for himself how the natural experience of landscape was changed by the war effort.

Lewin noticed that under wartime conditions, the entire scenario (perception, thinking and action) changed. Through his descriptive approach, he realised that the perception of the landscape is usually characterised by the vastness of the horizon, unlimited hiking across fields and through forests, a harmonious atmosphere in the great outdoors, and that in wartime this perception is completely transformed (despite nature remaining unchanged). The same landscape is characterised as a theatre of war by a tense situation and uncertain movement: orientation, borders, positions, barriers, locomotion.

In the phenomenological approach, the “fields” of the living space appear to be characterised by their own phenomenal character. Lewin also observed in everyday life that one and the same action has a completely different psychological profile depending on the context (Lewin, 1926; cf. Fitzek & Salber, 1996, p. 93) – for example, posting letters in letterboxes (official letters, family greetings, love letters), children’s games (observed, unobserved, under the stimulus of reward or the threat of punishment), later group dynamics (goal-oriented, uncontrolled), decision-making behaviour (under democratic, authoritarian leadership or in the context of *laissez-faire*).

5.2 As in Gestalt theory, the psychological profile of the field determines what is pursued as an impact unit in morphological analyses. Goethe’s plea for a delicate empiricism (*zarte Empirie*; Wahl, 2005) is pursued in Salber’s psychological morphology by choosing a consistently descriptive approach to its subject matter. The field of impact units is usually opened up through in-depth interviews lasting several hours. Through the descriptions of the interviews and the unification of these interview descriptions, a text is gradually generated in which raw material is developed into complex contexts of meaning.

The phenomenological approach aims to articulate the targeted phenomena – analogous to Dilthey’s plea for a “descriptive psychology” – in four methodological “versions”. In the *first version* of the morphological description, a vivid picture of the phenomenon is described (as a “basic quality”). As the first step in the description, this *basic quality* draws a kind of landscape picture of the impact unit, tracing its phenomenal appearance; the chosen quality must be able

to depict the main tendencies and nuances of the phenomenon under investigation in such a way that a pre-figurative order for the whole can be experienced in it (1st version; Fitzek, 2020, p. 716, 2024b, p. 244).

5.3 “One may well ask who came up with the idea of digging small holes in a landscape with the aim of hitting them with small balls. A large vastness with small balls – an initial artificial as well as artistic constellation. In addition, the small ball is not to be thrown with the more accurate hand, but with a club whose point of contact in the swing at is extremely small. Minimal changes to the point of contact have devastating consequences for the ball’s trajectory” (Marlovits, 2025, p. 297). Andreas Marlovits was quick to introduce the phenomenological foundations of morphology into questions of sports psychology and to explore all kinds of sports such as golf through meticulous descriptions (Marlovits, 2001, 2025). They are – also in the literal sense – qualified by differently designed fields, by rules, practices, handling of equipment and balls, and the body parts and functions activated in each case. It is not surprising that football is associated with aggression, as it essentially involves kicking a ball. From a morphological description, not only can the “basic qualities” of different sport games be discovered, but concrete consequences for sport psychology research and counselling can also be derived. Fuhlert and Krämer demonstrate this in their reconstruction of endurance running as an action unit (Fuhlert & Krämer, 2025).

5.4 Good feature films are characterised by the fact that they do not merely tell a coherent story about their main character(s) but place them in a “field” from which the various sequences of scenes and plot lines emerge as if by themselves. Thus, the seemingly individual inhibition of the king in Hooper’s film is from the outset part of a family situation that ultimately takes on global proportions. The field is marked by an institution in crisis, the British monarchy, which has stumbled on its way from past power to media publicity. What embodied imperial power and greatness for centuries has withered into a stage-like rigidity that, despite nominal powers, leaves the people involved with only limited scope for shaping their private lives. The individuals act as incapacitated protagonists in an ossified system.

The King’s Speech (in the sense of the manner of royal speech) is only superficially about the fate of a disabled person who ends up in the sphere of influence of a quirky speech therapist to get help with giving an important speech (the actual King’s Speech). The film is much more about the “landscape” conditions that initially make royal speech impossible and only allow a return to free speech against resistance. This requires much more than working with the royal larynx. Heavy

burdens must be lifted biographically, institutionally and in the relationship between client and therapist before the story of suffering can be worked through in such a way that creative forces are released.

The *basic quality* of the overall scenario described can be identified as a *feudal silencing*, which manifests itself in the compulsion to fixate on roles, in the pressure of the court, in the prince's silence, his lack of ambition and his inhibitions, and which, in rare moments of excitement, turns into inarticulate outbursts of anger (the art of swearing does not come out of nowhere). Stuttering appears in the character of the king as an expression of silencing (symptom) as well as an assurance of the status quo (compromise) with occasional outbursts of anger (reversal into the opposite).

The prince and later king vacillates between complete submission and outbursts of rage, which interfere like demons in the life of the otherwise gentle family man. Neither the silent endurance of his disenfranchisement nor the uncontrolled outbursts of "self-expression" help him escape the corset of the crown. Only in the course of therapy does he learn to come to terms with his troubled life story. Only here do appropriate memories of his early childhood emerge, in which, unlike his favoured older brother, he had to take a back seat and was tormented by a sadistic nanny, especially when the children were presented to their royal parents – with the effect that his older brother became the model prince at court, while he himself became the screaming child. Even then, his inability to express himself and claim his own voice was apparent.

The acquisition of memory marks a first step towards a corrective movement, for successful (self-)treatment promises to enable the king to literally regain his voice – but this cannot be achieved without help and, as it has been shown, does not work without setbacks.

6. Field tensions: locating spaces of impact

6.1 In addition to the phenomenological meaning of the term "field", Lewin had another connotation in mind from the outset. As a trained natural scientist, he was not only familiar with the physical concept of fields, but also saw the task of science in documenting (opposing) forces and energies in the psychological sphere – in the sense of fields of tension with common, divergent or opposing directions of action. Lewin's works are full of attempts to model psychological relationships in the manner of physical fields of tension and thus to demonstrate relationships of attraction and repulsion, action and reaction, energy and resistance (*cf.* Fitzek, 2014, p. 12).

Lewin understood, for example, children's desires and urges to express themselves and the prohibitions and punishments imposed by adults as a kind of positively

and negatively charged force field, and reconstructed the interruption, repetition and oversaturation of actions, as well as their avoidance and replacement, in terms of such attractive and deterrent tendencies. Lewin took action and counteraction as a basis for a physically grounded internal differentiation of fields: everything in the field affects everything else, and only what has an effect is real. This also forms the basis for the emphasis on current conditions in a given psychological field (*cf.* Bogner et al., 2023; Lück, 1996).

6.2 Unlike Lewin, morphology remains consistent with the descriptive method, even with regard to areas of tension. After highlighting a “basic quality”, a *second version* of the morphological description locates the unit of investigation as a structure of attractive, modifying and repulsive field tendencies (*impact space*; *cf.* Fitzek, 2020, p. 718; Fitzek, 2024b, p. 244). Here, too, it is based on Goethe, who had identified such relationships as “fundamental properties of living entities” in nature: “to separate, to unite, to merge into the general, to remain in the particular, to transform, to specify..., to emerge and disappear, to solidify and melt, to harden and flow, to expand and contract” (von Goethe, 1949, p. 705).

Morphological descriptions structure the features of psychological self-treatment of reality in a similar way. The scope of formation is either designed inductively from the phenomenological properties of the specific impact units (model of “transfiguration”; *cf.* Salber, 1989, p. 91) or deductively from a spectrum of exemplary field tendencies that Salber had developed for comparing different impact units (*morphological hexagram*; *cf.* Salber, 1965/2009, p. 267).

The more inductive approach sorts the field tendencies according to the logic of *figurations*. More distinct traits of influence form a main figuration, while more subtle, complementary but promising traits are arranged in a complementary secondary figuration. In the football example, these would be, apart from kicking the ball: the formation of a close-knit unit, the experience of physical resistance, standing close together on the pitch, from which, however, in the sense of a secondary figuration, an elegant action is then to be conjured up on the field (Marlovits, 2025). With the help of the prototypical effects of the morphological hexagram, it becomes easier to categorise the features of the spaces of impact and relate them to each other: here, for each impact unit, we track what tends towards the polarities of absorbing-becoming, shaping-organising, expanding-equipping (Salber, 1969/2007, p. 80). Thus, as a second example from sports, endurance running is geared towards constant repetition (absorbing), which on the other hand leaves room for variation (becoming), while the ups and downs specific to running (shaping) are held together by rhythms (organising) in which a feeling of weightlessness can expand, which in turn is equipped with an iron constitution on the other side (*cf.* Fuhlert & Krämer, 2025).

6.3 As in the examples from sports psychology, the core of each description is the continuation of phenomenology in categories of the space of impact. The contributions in the journal can also be distinguished according to the different forms of fulfilling this second version of the morphological description (as transfiguration or hexagram). Figurations are described not only by Marlovits but also by Hodde. In addition to Fuhlert and Krämer, Hinterding and Giebel as well as Zwingmann, and Warmuth and Mair classify the space of impact as a hexagram. Blothner (“cultivation spiral”) and Levetzow (use of “narratives”), on the other hand, show with their contributions that further patterns of categorization are possible. A comparison of the different kinds of structuring the space of impact also provides a good overview of how close (or how far apart) the research practices of morphologists working at academic institutions are today.

6.4 A striking feature of morphological film psychology is that it does not engage in character studies, but rather pursues questions that examine the film experience as a sequence (action unit) or as a development of specific lifeworlds (impact unit). The lifeworld staged in *The King's Speech* was revealed in the phenomenological approach as a national, social and individual disability (basic quality: feudal silencing). In the second version of morphological description, it can be broken down into a *main figuration* that represents the coercive nature of inherited leadership that has found itself in a tight spot, contrasted by a secondary figuration from which the initially rather vague chances of possible regeneration open up.

Only seemingly do the protagonists live in a world of *immeasurable possibilities* (first structural tendency of the main figuration): The glamour of the leading world power also transports the film audience into the unchallenged supremacy of a family that has ruled for centuries, with a political and social elite at its feet and seemingly inexhaustible resources of wealth, glamour and honours. However, this unique position is also associated with *total powerlessness and ineffectiveness* (2nd tendency), which formally forces the royal family to make all the decisions it has to make, mediated by the relentless rule of an intrigue-ridden court society and its written and unwritten laws.

The only ways out for the individual representatives of the crown are to actively embody the imposed order (the old king), to escape more or less covertly into intoxication and pleasure (the heir to the throne), or to fall silent in private retreats (the second-born, who has no choice but to eventually ascend the throne himself). For the media, *illusory worlds* are staged (3rd tendency) that have nothing to do with the actual lives of the protagonists, which in turn are completely arbitrary and of no interest to anyone, but must not be made public under any circumstances. The external constraints and the associated paradoxes are reflected in *all kinds of oddities* (4th tendency of the main figuration); in

Bertie's case, they lead to speechlessness, which produces mutilated articulation (silence and stuttering) alongside inarticulate outbursts (shouting and swearing) and turns the overly conformist Bertie into a stutterer prone to outbursts of rage.

In the film, it is not grand scenes and spectacular progress in therapy that refer to the *complementary figuration*. Rather, it is the subtle contact with the possibilities of remaining human in all this madness. Thus, there are rare scenes in which the otherwise shy and inhibited Bertie shows himself to be assertive and never at a loss for a joke.

In contrast to the scheming court camarilla and especially his light-footed brother, the inconspicuous prince quickly displays an attitude of performing his duties with *dignity and perseverance* (1st trait of the secondary figuration). In this way, he corresponds exactly to the appearance of his speech therapist alter ego Lionel Logue and other subtle sources of support such as the moral authority Winston Churchill, who early on recognises Bertie as the better candidate for the throne and honours his upright attitude.

The *acting and comedic qualities* in the film also stand out as a secondary character (2nd trait), which initially only occur in the therapist's world, but gradually spill over into the therapeutic process – for example, when Bertie devotes himself to physical exercises like a circus clown or when he declaims in song what he cannot express in conversation. Small gestures in which the protagonists communicate with each other in an ironic manner about how to play the game of power are among the most relaxed and funny scenes in the film. Towards the end, they take the film audience into the recording room for the speech, where the paradox of an *authentic theatrical production* for the benefit of the public takes place (3rd trait). The king chuckles and hesitates, stumbles, dances, sings and swears (invisibly and inaudibly!) to his therapist's stage directions, while the speech itself is solemn and dignified – at the end it is a success!

7. Cultural atmospheres: uncovering dramaturgies of self-treatment

7.1 Kurt Lewin's writings testify to a broad understanding of the field concept, in which the connection to the landscapes and gravitation fields is explicitly emphasised. A third field model is extremely significant, but Lewin is reserved to explicitly name it – perhaps because it derives from the social realm which became more and more self-evident in Lewin's psychology. As he had almost observed during his years in Berlin, human beings move according to predetermined or spontaneously generated dramaturgies, even in experimental situations, and even more so in their everyday lives. They act on a stage of often implicitly shared rules, occupy positions, assign themselves roles and take on functions according to an often anonymous direction.

In addition to the phenomenological and quasi-physical modelling of fields, Lewin focused on scopes in the private and public sphere, which leave more or less possibilities for defining actions. While his experiments with groups generated and maintained such playing fields of social interactions with more or less restrictive rules of behaviour, he later became engaged in the sceneries and dramaturgies of companies, population groups or whole nations which he used to call “cultural atmospheres” (Binder, 2023, p. 164; cf. Bogner et al., 2023).

7.2 The sublime constitutions of the socio-cultural atmospheres (leadership, obedience, resistance, shifts, leaving the field) brought Lewin close to depth psychological positions, but this did not turn field theory into depth psychology. This is different in psychological morphology, which was increasingly influenced by depth psychology, especially with regard to the idea of cultivation processes in a narrower or broader sense. More and more Salber saw the self-treatment of reality as a cultivation process of dramatic dimensions, as proverbially staged by depth psychology: directed by “complexes” and “archetypes” of poetic design (Oedipus; Night Sea Voyage). In this sense, life seems to be constantly managed by the immanent claims and demands of cultivation, which only approximately and fragmentarily come to consciousness. Because of the contradictory nature of these demands, cultivation principally cannot come to a satisfying solution (Freud’s *Unbehagen in der Kultur*), the self-treatment of reality necessarily remains uncomplete. As a morphologist Salber conceived the imperfection of culture in the paradoxical conditions of formation / transformation, from which a variety of (paradoxical) cultivation patterns emerge – in everyday life (Salber, 1989) as well as in cultural history (Salber, 1993; cf. Fitzek, 2024a, p. 102).

For the methodological approach to impact units in everyday life (sports, media, organisations, etc.), the deepening of cultural psychology in the third methodological version entails a focus on fundamental, but often unconscious core problems of Gestalt (e.g. bringing together the dimensions of finiteness and infinity, simplicity and differentiation, binding and detachment, unity and division). But even at the point of greatest condensation (on core problems of Gestalt like these), the morphological method remains descriptive. As in all versions of the morphological method, the modelling of Gestalt problems in impact units is done in a descriptive way. What gives the description its hold at the point of greatest condensation is the representation of these fundamental problem cores in the eternal narratives of humanity. Freud and Jung had brought them together with mythological narratives, whereas Salber identifies them in the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm: the ambivalences of the eternal and the transitory, of freedom and determination, of the comprehensive and the particular (and many others) are told in fairy tales in a particular way. In his analyses of fairy tales,

Salber assigns specific fairy tales to each of the core problems of formation and transformation - in the two editions of his books *Fairy Tale Analysis* (1987, 1999), a total of about 30 basic relationships (cf. Fitzek, 2024a, p. 105; 2024b, p. 245).

From a morphological perspective, fairy tales are the scripts of transformation. They deal with the basic relationships of human existence from the perspective of a narratively fragmented core problem. For example, the fairy tale *The Wishing-Table, the Gold-Ass, and the Cudgel in the Sack* deals with the problem of unity and multiplicity. *The Frog Prince or Iron Henry* deals with the reversal of the developed into the banal and vice versa, and *Sleeping Beauty* deals with the duality of determination and freedom. By assigning each fairy tale a specific problem of self-treatment of reality, morphological descriptions of impact units find a pivot point from which the phenomenal breadth of statements on the respective subject is manageable. So, each impact unit receives “its fairy tale” after detailed collection and analysis using the methodological versions of the morphological description. Because the core of this moving drama of human existence does not lie on the surface of the interview statements (therefore *in-depth* interviews!), the method works at this point by sharpening and breaking down the statements with regard to the structural features of fairy tales (cf. Fitzek, 2020, p. 713, 2024b, p. 243).

Starting from the identified core of the problem and its *transformation pattern* (3rd version of morphological description), the description at last returns to the phenomenological language of the interview statements by juxtaposing illustrative *solution types* for dealing with the problem after its Gestalt core has been discovered (4th version of morphological description; cf. Fitzek 2020, p. 720, 2024b, p. 245).

7.3 The psychology of problem cores of transformation and their fairy tale narratives is rather typical of Salber’s cultural-psychological analyses from his later years. Initially concerned with timeless problems of formation and transformation, Salber only realised the importance of self-treatment of reality and the resulting cultivation process in the 1980s, first in everyday life (*All-Tag*; Salber, 1987, 1989), and later in the reconstruction of epochs of cultural history (*soul revolution*; Salber, 1993). Dirk Blothner traces this development in his contribution to this issue and (as the first author ever) traces Salber’s late work after his retirement (1993), in which the author no longer had to take scientific discourse into consideration and developed a “metapsychology” that has hardly been discussed even among morphologists (Blothner, 2025). Laura Levetzow also undertakes a freer interpretation of the version model and its relationship to narratives, analysing her research on generational change in family businesses regarding recurring narrative patterns in the self-descriptions of company representatives (Levetzow, 2025).

7.4 As Salber has pointed out, the core problems of transformation are revealed in the exchange of fairy tales. It is certainly no coincidence that in the film, too, a fairy tale shows the way to the world of silenced urges for expression: pressed by his daughters for a bedtime story, Bertie once invents the story of a prince who is turned into a penguin by an evil wizard and can no longer take his daughters in his arms for a goodnight kiss. Because he is also banished to the South Pole and is the only bird that cannot fly, he has to become inventive to return to his family. He dives under the oceans and thus returns to his daughters, who help him to transform himself again. Although he does not regain his royal appearance but now finds himself to be a similarly clumsy albatross, he thereby has such enormous wings that he can easily envelop his daughters with them – which ends the story and prompts Bertie to lovingly take Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret into his arms for a good night kiss.

It is not only this direct reference that reveals analogies to the stuttering king, who, outwardly the supreme sovereign, is in fact trapped in institutional constraints. On the public stage, a drama of unprecedented freedom and compelling predestination unfolds. The monarch, too, is under a spell that humiliates him in public despite his imperial splendour. He, too, manages to escape into the family sphere, but this only alleviates his disability, it does not remove it.

The self-invented fairy tale needs to be supplemented because, although it clearly depicts the king's personal situation and symptoms, the secondary characters – and thus the chance for a productive twist in the whole story – are underrepresented (most notably in the spirit of invention, in diving through, in living with the impairment). Here, the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm are harsher and more precise, as Salber has shown. In this respect, it is worthwhile to look for tales that reflect the Gestalt relationship between freedom and determination and that more clearly reveal a secondary figuration that broadens the boundaries of change.

According to Salber, the *core problem of determination and freedom* is dealt with, for example, in the well-known fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*, as well as in lesser-known fairy tales such as *Three Feathers* or *The Bee Queen*. In a short text on *The King's Speech* (Salber, 2011), Salber has, exceptionally, drawn on a fairy tale by H.C. Andersen, presumably because of its striking analogies in terms of content. Ironically, it features another bird in the title, one that shares its clumsy appearance with penguins and albatrosses and is often confused with the latter: the booby. And with *Booby Hans*, it deals with a title character who seems to have been written specifically for the stuttering prince.

“Two brothers who submit to the constraints of encyclopaedic knowledge and technical expertise want to win the hand of a king's daughter. That is one side

of the psychological set exposed in the tale; the other side is represented by the initially secretive younger brother, Hans the Fool. He carries seemingly nonsensical gifts with him, whatever he finds along the way: a dead crow, a wooden shoe, mud. The princess's castle is overheated by a furnace. The overly conformist, compulsively perverse brothers in soul are left speechless. 'Away!' says the princess. However, the simpleton part can use his voice, he gets his views across, and he can attack the castle's supervisory authorities with his mud. 'That was well done', said the princess, 'I couldn't have done that. But I'll learn.' Hans becomes king, just as the stutterer becomes king when he finds his voice again. Against all coercion, free play, the seemingly crazy, the unconsciously meaningful prevails" (Salber, 2011, p. 7).

8. Action research: handling the transitions from object to method

8.1 Lewin's concept of field opens yet another aspect of morphological investigations, which characterises the position of researchers in the field of research and at the same time leads to the relationship between psychological research and psychological counselling. The social interactions located on cultural stages and directed by covered dramaturgies involve the participants in different roles. The protagonists take on roles in a drama that makes them leaders, sceptics, victims or followers. They naturally assume the functions of autocratic or democratic leadership or participate in a directionless laissez-faire approach (*cf.* Fitzek, 1996).

However, acting in the field is not limited to the actors being studied; according to Lewin, it explicitly involves the researchers. Already in his experiments on action and affect psychology with his colleagues, Lewin had noted the (sometimes unintentional) involvement of researchers in the research and made experimental use of it (Dembo, 1931, as cited in Fitzek, 2014, p. 37). Psychological research is field research, for which Lewin explicitly introduced the term "action research" toward the end of his life (Lewin, 1946). Lewin increasingly planned his experiments like productions in which a stage was created on which the actors acted (*cf.* Binder, 2023, p. 173). In these productions psychologists do not maintain their research distance but personally enter the sphere of the research subject if they want to achieve an effect and bring about behavioural changes. This attitude can be lamented as a departure from "objectivity" or used as a source of further insights that are not subject to the momentum of the research process, but critically reflect on "errors".

8.2 Here, too, morphology brings the field concept together with depth psychological considerations. It refers in particular to the author Georges Devereux, who was well versed in both Gestalt theory and psychoanalysis, and who believed

that the transfer of object relationships into research logic was unavoidable (Devereux, 1967).

Research in morphology is explicitly required not only to “move with” the object, but also to reflect this movement as part of the research process, which, as a consequence, is in itself part of the object being researched. This reflexive structure requires constant attention to the research dynamics experienced and endured (e.g. also in the in-depth interviews), but on the other hand enables methodical participation in the subject matter, which can be made fruitful especially in the transition from research to counselling (Fitzek, 2020, p. 725).

In counselling processes, the subject of the investigation becomes the agent of change. This happens in the context of morphological psychology in individual counselling as well as in organisational counselling and in counselling formats using aesthetic media (music therapy, art coaching). In accordance with the concept of *Analytische Intensivberatung* (*analytical intensive counselling*, own translation), the counselling process is conceived as a “joint work” between the counsellor and the client, whereby the counsellor is required to keep an eye on the dynamics emerging between the participants in the counselling process (through self-reflection and supervision) (Endres & Salber, 2001, p. 69).

Salber has characterised *Intensivberatung* as an “art-analogous setting” (2009, p. 78). In doing so, he picks up on the fact that psychological analysis cannot, in principle, be understood as a process of its own, but must instead be understood as a continuation of the self-treatment of reality with other (psychological) means – as a psychological treatment of everyday life’s treatment. The treatment (of treatment) can go in a calming or stirring direction. Seen in this light, morphology is another tool in the history of self-discovery of the psyche. At the end of his life, Salber spoke of morphology as “psychological psychology” in a manner that was as enthusiastic as it was provocative.

8.3 As an artistic illustration of the transition of research subject and research object, the film *Kitchen Stories* depicts the seemingly harmless exploration of everyday life in Norwegian living rooms by Swedish anthropologists. Science leaves its laboratories and boldly enters the practical lives of people. Wolfram Domke shows the appealing, fateful and, in any case, inevitable aspects of psychological field research in his concluding essay on psychology’s movement with the world of people. With his translation of the psychological research attitude (between interference and distancing) into the fairy tale of the *Sea Hare*, he also provides a good insight into the practice of the morphological fairy tale analysis (Domke, 2025).

8.4 *The King's speech* does not depict psychological treatment in the narrower sense, but the speech therapist's original approach has much in common with a psychological setting. After all, over the course of the film's plot, the false magic of supposedly "free" self-determination is successfully reversed by strengthening the secondary figuration of practising perseverance, learning through play, and especially of authentic staging. It is the disruptive but always promising achievement of the working alliance between Bertie and Logue, who, through effort and guidance and by accepting setbacks and interruptions, gradually enable the silenced monarch to find back his voice. That holds the film together as a work of art and leaves a lasting impression on the viewer.

To this end, the film itself finds an image that captures not the patient's effort or the therapist's skill, but the joint work that sustains the therapeutic process. The king can only speak openly about himself and his childhood when he comes across a model aeroplane in Logue's home, which he tinkers with as if by chance. Through this tinkering, he recalls his own buried passion for a playful and hand-crafted approach to reality, which, in a figurative sense, also characterises the therapeutic endeavour and keeps it going despite all the setbacks. It is the joint tinkering that connects the royal client with the speech therapist and welds them together into an ever-improvising team of success. This joint handicraft of the unlikely protagonists forms the real basis for progress in the film.

In this respect, the film is also a good example of how personal insights are not responsible for the success of the treatment process. In the film, it is not the progress of the royal patient that holds the speech therapy together, which remains susceptible to disruption until the very last scene. It is the ongoing struggle to establish a trustworthy alliance, with hopes, fears, failures, expressions of trust, misunderstandings and arguments, that proves the success of a working community which is able to defy court protocol – while constantly observing the (therapeutic) rules set and stubbornly defended by Logue.

The resulting royal-acting craftwork reaches its symbolic climax (= Gestalt closure) with the king's World War speech to the peoples of the British Empire ("The King's Speech") staged at the end. Here, the joint work unfolds in its full breadth and takes on a scenic (form) conciseness that is characteristic of good feature films. The prerequisite for this success is Bertie's and Logue's retreat to the separated recording studio, where the king addresses his speech to the world exclusively to Logue. Behind closed doors, an interplay of gestures, facial expressions, movements and sounds begins, which is powerfully underscored for the film audience by Beethoven's 7th Symphony (which, interestingly, most of those I interviewed did not even notice). Riding this wave of sound, the king, his therapist and the audience travel together to the peoples of the British Empire, whose rapt listening to their radios on every continent is faded into the sequence of scenes.

Conclusion

Similar to Gestalt theory, psychological morphology was originally based on visual and thinking experiences and proceeded from the significance of its questions for life, the holism of the thematic contexts, and the lawful effect of a fundamental Gestalt dynamic in transpersonal fields of action. Like Gestalt theory, it works methodically based on phenomenological description, the reconstruction of areas of tension, the uncovering of cultural atmospheres, and the involvement of researchers in the field of research.

Unlike Gestalt theory, morphology also refers to depth psychological traditions, it addresses everyday life as the basis for identifying supra-personal (action and impact) units of behaviour, that, methodologically, can be described by a constant sequence of methodological turns (“versions”) of a morphological description. Despite (or because of) its essentially unchanging methods, morphology is applied across the entire content spectrum of psychology and is represented in this issue by corresponding contributions from morphological fields of research: as everyday psychology, market and media research, sports psychology, cultural and art psychology, organisational psychology and organisational consulting, music therapy and intensive counselling.

Morphological psychology is particularly convincing when it is used in practical research and counselling and can play to the strengths of a phenomenon-based “art-analogous” method (Endres & Salber, 2001, p. 78; Fitzek, 2020, p. 715). In a fundamental text such as this, this advantage cannot, by definition, be played to its full potential; perhaps the passages on Hooper’s film convey an impression of the descriptive practice of morphology. In any case, the author enjoyed having one of his favourite films at his side as a companion through the theoretical and methodological characteristics of morphology; he also sees himself as an action researcher and can therefore recognise clear analogies to his own life and work in the film. But that would be a whole other story...

Summary

Gestalt theory and morphology are concepts of Gestalt psychology that were developed at different times in different places in Germany. Wilhelm Salber’s psychological morphology takes from Gestalt theory its focus on the significance of its questions for life, the holism of the thematic contexts and the lawful effect of a fundamental Gestalt dynamic in supra-personal fields of action. Like Gestalt theory, it works methodically on the basis of phenomenological description, the reconstruction of areas of tension, the discovery of culturally shaped atmospheres of behaviour, and the (inevitable and useful) involvement of researchers in the field of research. Unlike Gestalt theory, morphology also refers to depth psychological traditions, it addresses the richness of the moment as the basis for self-treatment of reality and methodically penetrates to the core of impact units via

a constant sequence of versions of a morphological description. This method is used in everyday psychology, market and media impact research, sports psychology, cultural and art psychology, organisational psychology and intensive counselling, as documented by contributions from morphological researchers from all fields in this issue of Gestalt Theory. The theoretical prerequisites and methodological consequences are exemplified in this introductory article to the journal with the film *The King's Speech* (2011).

Keywords: Gestalt Theory, Morphology, Psychology of Everyday Life, Cultural Psychology, Psychology of Film

Zusammenfassung

Gestalttheorie und Morphologie sind Konzepte der Gestaltpsychologie, die zu unterschiedlichen Zeiten an verschiedenen Orten in Deutschland entwickelt wurden. Aus der Gestalttheorie übernimmt Wilhelm Salbers psychologische Morphologie die Orientierung an der Lebensbedeutsamkeit ihrer Fragestellungen, der Ganzheitlichkeit der thematisierten Sinnzusammenhänge und dem gesetzlichen Wirken einer grundlegenden Gestaltdynamik in überpersonalen Wirkungsfeldern. Sie arbeitet wie diese methodisch auf der Grundlage von phänomenologischer Beschreibung, der Rekonstruktion von Spannungsfeldern, der Thematisierung von narrativ strukturierten Spielfeldern des menschlichen Zusammenlebens und des Einbezugs der Forschenden in das Forschungsfeld. Anders als die Gestalttheorie bezieht sich die Morphologie auch auf kultur- und tiefenpsychologische Traditionslinien, sie thematisiert die Fülle des Augenblicks als Grundlage der Selbstbehandlung von Wirklichkeit und dringt zum Kern der Wirkungseinheiten methodisch über eine konstante Abfolge der Versionen einer morphologischen Beschreibung vor. Mit dieser Methode wird gearbeitet in der Alltagspsychologie, der Markt- und Medienwirkungsforschung, Sportpsychologie, Kultur- und Kunstpsychologie, in der Organisationspsychologie und Intensivberatung, was durch Beiträge der morphologisch Forschenden aus allen Bereichen in der vorliegenden Ausgabe der Gestalt Theory dokumentiert wird. Exemplifiziert werden die einzelnen theoretisch/methodischen Bestimmungen in diesem einführenden Beitrag zum Heft am Film *The King's Speech* (2011).

Schlüsselwörter: Gestalttheorie, Morphologie, Alltagspsychologie, Kulturpsychologie, Filmpsychologie

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