

Original Contributions - Originalbeiträge

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On the Position of Salber's Cultivation Spiral in Psychological Morphology

In psychology, changing perspectives lead to new models of how mental processes work. One example of this is the cultivation spiral concept formulated by Wilhelm Salber (2002, 2008). Which aspect of mental reality does this model address? What questions gave rise to it? Why does psychological morphology need this concept? What position does it occupy in Wilhelm Salber's oeuvre? This article aims to introduce the concept. It understands it as a late but logical step in the development of psychological morphology.

Salber's early conceptualisations were generally subject to detailed systematisation. This applies in particular to his large-scale draft for a general psychology (Salber, 1965), but also to his systematisations of the psychology of impact units (Salber, 1969a) and character development (Salber, 1969b). Salber's presentation makes the workings of the soul appear like a carefully constructed and regulated clockwork mechanism, in which one part meshes seamlessly and in constant succession with another, producing a metamorphic formative process. This cannot be said of the concept of the cultivation spiral, which was developed some forty years later. The psychological processes it depicts appear more incoherent, dramatic and crisis-ridden, and are characterised by a rather jerky progression. Nor is this a model that has been worked out in detail. Salber only sketches it twice in a few pages of his books. He refrains from providing a detailed explanation of the terms that make it up or from classifying it within the overall structure of his psychology.

To make it clear right away: this article does not see the mannerism of the concept, the leaps and reversals it exhibits, as a shortcoming. It understands the sometimes direct nature of the terminology as an expression of Salber's turn towards a metapsychological perspective, which allowed him to describe psychological phenomena in a more lifelike way and to grasp them theoretically. Salber understood metapsychology as philosophising about the foundations of mental existence. How do gestalten arise? How do they cope in the given world? In his writings, he increasingly established the view that gestalten are concerned with survival in a fluid and tense reality. Within the framework of this theoretical orientation, he sought to dispense with formalising concepts and to approach the

often overlooked but nevertheless describable, banal and dramatic phenomena of this “struggle for survival”. In doing so, he followed the programme he had set himself early on, namely “to grasp mental events as they really are” (Salber, 1965, p. 302).

As incomplete and sketchy as Salber’s model of the cultivation spiral may appear, and as little as it may follow formalistic dimensions, it is certainly worth discovering, highlighting and classifying.

1. Cultivation

Salber was just as interested in the mundane hours of the day (Salber, 1985) as he was in the experiences that a great work of art (Salber, 1977) can evoke in its viewers. He focused on the changing everyday activities of people (Salber, 1989), but also on the cultural forms (Salber, 1993) that have determined their coexistence for decades. His psychology understands how to stretch out lived moments as well as trace long-term developments. If one looks for a motif that organises all these manifestations, one finds it in the hypothesis that psychological formations seek to ensure their survival through processes of cultivation. This is an idea that Salber found particularly in his historical works on many thinkers whom he regarded as kindred spirits. For Salber, “cultivation” became a theoretical perspective that allowed him to survey the immense diversity of psychological phenomena. The cultivation of a restless, tense reality thus became the central idea of his metapsychology mentioned above.

Development is the unfolding and differentiation of a mental connection in its given context. Cultivation adds an intentional component to this idea. The concept introduces an interest of the psyche in forming itself as something in reality that is lasting, can exist on its own, and aims to survive as a connection. Cultivation is always also a creation of a world. The creation of a world and the effort to preserve this world through structure-forming transformation against the onslaughts of a turbulent reality.

In order to anchor this basic idea in Western cultural history, Salber referred to creation myths as recorded in the Bible and by Ovid. Both deal with the emergence of the world from darkness and chaos, with the formation of a reality in which human life is possible. Salber was also taken with Freud’s model of development (1905), in which the laborious cultivation of a polymorphous order of infantile sexuality ultimately leads to what we regard as adult life.

Salber also saw cultivation processes at work in the formations of everyday life. At first glance, these may seem orderly and uneventful. However, if we consider periods of time in which people cannot fall back on their familiar daily routines, in which they do not encounter recurring tasks and routines that have become second nature, it quickly becomes clear what hardships they are exposed to

without such formal structures. Without wanting to, they are drawn into the maelstrom of temptation, their best intentions overtaken by patterns of behaviour from the past. They feel tensions rising that demand immediate attention. This turmoil can give rise to explosive confrontations, which in turn lead to responses that result in unbridled escalations. Even if the turmoil of the soul is rarely consciously experienced as such, and people try to repress the everyday drama, it nevertheless manifests itself in anxiety, tension and what they like to call "stress". By cultivating refined forms, they seek to counteract this turmoil every day anew.

Returning to the creation myths mentioned above, it is indeed the case that psychological constructs seek to emerge from a turbulent mixture in order to ensure their survival. Thus, forms that bring balance into play appear everywhere like rays of hope. Constructions emerge that open up perspectives promising stability and continuity. For example, when people engage in conversation with one another in order to work out a common solution to a problem that has arisen. Or when they come together within the framework of regulations that enable productive cooperation. In this way, human endeavours find their place in a turbulent, tense reality. We like to describe the constitutions they form in this way as "cultivated" because they counteract a relapse into chaos.

It is characteristic of Salber's thinking that he did not regard these measured constitutions of life as a final state. They can also turn into forms of over-cultivation. The resulting over-shaping of banal circumstances, which is alien to life, then brings about changes that can lead to disintegration and collapse. The twists and turns of the cultivation spiral outlined below illustrate this process of constant formation and transformation.

2. References to Gestalt psychology

In his early years, Salber had dealt extensively with the investigations and concepts of Gestalt theory and psychology. (Salber, 1965) In doing so, his attention repeatedly turned to conceptualisations of psychological events that understood them as an inseparable production context. He saw this orientation primarily in the Gestalt theory investigations of Wertheimer, who had posited the thesis that "gestalten are the flesh and blood of mental events" (Salber, 1965, p. 195). He also dealt in detail with the question of the extent to which Lewin's (1926) concept of "action wholes" had succeeded in consistently fulfilling Wertheimer's theorem (Salber, 1956, p. 142). Fitzek and Salber (1996) later carefully retraced this reappraisal of the conceptualisations of Gestalt, three years after Salber ended his teaching career at the University of Cologne.

However, as his metapsychological considerations became more prominent, Salber's view of the pioneers' theoretical constructs changed. He now focused on aspects that could be linked to the concept of cultivation. As early as 1956, Salber

distinguished his morphological approach from Gestalt theory: “The decisive morphological characteristic lies in the *transformation* of form motifs, in the *reshaping* of meaningful forms”. And he quotes Jean Paul: “When gestalt paints, who paints it? ... The action, replies Lessing” (Salber, 1956, p. 147). Such formulations already hinted at Salber’s interest in processes of cultivation as a metapsychological principle. In his later writings, he paid less tribute to Lewin’s work as an attempt to psychologically grasp the natural units of the psyche with his concept of action-holism. Instead, he emphasised that Lewin had taken up concepts from Freudian psychoanalysis such as “resistance, substitution, demand” (Salber, 2025, p. 258). This was because Freud’s concept of fate of instincts in defense could in turn be easily combined with his own concept of cultivation. These concepts reflect the efforts of a psychological gestalt to remain alive through transformation.

Strangely, in Salber’s later psychological columns (2010-2016), the pioneers of Gestalt theory and psychology, who were frequently mentioned in the early days, no longer occur. With one crucial exception. In a very short text on the basic principles of psychological morphology (Salber, 2011), he placed Christian von Ehrenfels, the founder of Gestalt psychology, in the same league as Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilhelm Dilthey and Sigmund Freud. Because Ehrenfels discovered “gestalt qualities” not only in isolated optical and acoustic objects of perception, but also in complex forms of cultivation such as a Wagner opera, Salber saw the core of the cultivation concept in Ehrenfels’ thinking. In addition, in a later work he called “Kosmogenie” (Cosmogenesis), Ehrenfels had posited a universal fundamental problem that concrete gestalt formations seek to address: the “henogenic principle” and the “chaotogenic principle” (e.g., Salber, 1965, p. 182). Salber saw this as the beginning of a metapsychology related to his own visionary experience: “Surprisingly, experience and behaviour in the art of mental survival are driven by paradoxes that stem from a ‘holistic’ desire for transformation, which pushes for cultivated forms of human survival” (Salber, 2011, 6).

3. Gestalten in development

If cultivation is a fundamental activity of psychological structures and, in metapsychological terms, constitutes the core of life, then the question arises as to how such a process can be broken down more precisely into models. This chapter will briefly present and distinguish between three conceptualisations with which Salber answered this question.

When looking for influences that shaped Salber’s metapsychological considerations, one cannot ignore Goethe. His morphological writings not only gave his psychology its name. Formulations such as “formation, transformation, the eternal mind’s eternal recreation” (von Goethe, 1832, p. 50) express a view of

reality that became the impetus and programme for Salber's psychology. The verse expresses five structural features that prepare the concept of cultivation:

Firstly, psyche is given as an inseparable context. One thing is preserved with another in a meaningful whole ("Mind"). Secondly, psychological phenomena are not merely shaped. The life of the soul itself is active shaping. It is not sufficient to become aware of it, to perceive figures, but it acts on reality and imposes forms on it ("Formation"). Thirdly, by acting in this way, the soul transforms reality and itself ("Transformation"). Fourthly, the various features and dimensions of psyche are understood in common productions. One responds to the other, and both thereby set a whole in motion ("Recreation"). Fifthly, the "eternal recreation" of the "eternal mind" provides human beings with a structured, impersonal context of interrelationships. It is a sphere of action from which gestalten emerge as creations, challenging them with its manifold tasks and tensions and at the same time urging them to achieve survival through movements that respond to them. Against this background, forms of cultivation realise themselves as transformations in a process of transformation.

a) Formation of action forms

In "Morphologie des seelischen Geschehens" (Salber 1965), movement in the mind comes about through the challenging and complementary interaction of the creative directions of six different types of structuring ("conditions"). To make their interaction comprehensible, Salber contrasts the extreme form of one condition ("foundation") with the demands of the other five ("representation"). Viable forms emerge when, for example, a tendency towards "setting" (foundation of the condition "historicisation") must incorporate "changes" brought about by the other conditions. Only if it allows itself to be shaped by them can it assert its own logic. Similarly, the extreme tendency of "self-movement" (foundation of "metamorphosis of meaning") is challenged by the other conditions, which enter into a "confrontation" with it.

From the tension between the six conditions, the "unit of action" emerges as one that represents the demands of the whole by seeking to enforce a concrete "internal logic" (as a foundation). Salber subdivides the movement of these units using formal concepts that also serve as points of reference for their methodological breakdown. The arc of development of the unified action is enlivened by a "basis" that pushes for unfolding and seeks to round itself off in its "fulfilment". In the process, it forms a "theme" that significantly distinguishes it from other units. Intermediate steps in the arc of development are achieved through individual "profiling" and overarching "formations". The moment of "framing" ensures that the form can maintain its direction and does not disintegrate into single shapes.

The formation of cultivation forms is not the subject of this model. A spiral-shaped development is not envisaged. Cultivation only plays a role insofar as the current forms take up the forms offered by culture. An example frequently cited by Salber (1965, p. 140) is the complex development of the film experience. Here, viewers allow a work of cultural entertainment to draw them into the struggle for survival of a character. Without having to fear consequences for body and soul, they can engage in cultivation that would extend over days and years in everyday life.

b) Self-treatment in versions

Twenty years later, Salber's (1983) ideas about gestalten in development have changed significantly. The whole in development is there from the outset as a separate category. Its formation and transformation are broken down into a sequence of four distinct versions: gestalt logic, transformation, construction and paradox.

Even though Salber does not yet explicitly refer to "cultivation" here, the processes of self-treatment of a tense whole can nevertheless be understood in this direction. The version model paints a picture of a mental ability that advances the units of action in everyday life through four different forms of restructuring, thereby ensuring their survival in the flow of reality. If this is exposed to stress within the framework of one version, the unit threatens to disintegrate, but by switching to another version, it finds a way to extend its life cycle.

Salber understood the versions that came into play in the movement as a "functional development spectrum" (Salber, 1983, p. 87). When gestalten seek to maintain and expand themselves in the real world, they have four "solution patterns" (Salber, 1983, p. 102) at their disposal. They can broaden their scope by modelling their specific gestalt logic (first version). If they reach their limits, they can further shape the process by emphasising the basic conditions mentioned above (second version). The gestalten in motion are also free to become aware of their constructed nature and to rearrange it (third version). And after they have tested the scope of their survival through such changes and still find themselves in a predicament, they can accept this as an expression of one of the irresolvable paradoxes in life and thus ensure their preservation. One such paradox is, for example, the fact that gestalten can only preserve themselves through change (fourth version).

c) Cultivation in versions

Twenty years later, Salber's Psychological Morphology prompted him to rethink gestalt formation and transformation once again. In the meantime, he had been preoccupied with the cultivation of the psyche in the context of European cultural

history (Salber, 1993). In this context, he understood cultural development as an ongoing "revolution of the mind", whose individual stages he made comprehensible by using the patterns of old folk tales. It is characteristic of Salber's research and thinking that he set himself tasks that had not yet been tackled in psychology. In order to emphasise the daring, necessarily simplistic nature of his broad outline, he called his relatively short representation of cultural development a "comic history of the soul".

Salber could have left it at this description of cultural epochs from the Stone Age to the second half of the 20th century. But the metapsychological background of his observations, investigations and thinking compelled him to go beyond the description of distinct cultural images and search for a rule-like model with which the rebellious momentum of their emergence and divergence could be traced psychologically. He was interested in the transitions between the cultural images he described and wanted to work out more precisely how and why they sometimes oscillate violently between each other. Against the backdrop of his metapsychological thesis that the psyche is concerned with the survival of gestalten, he did not want to see cultivation as a continuous process of formation and transformation, perhaps similar to how he viewed the machinery of action units in Morphology of Mental Events. He was driven to develop a model with which he could fulfil a promise that had led him to break away from the concepts of old Gestalt psychology in his younger years. He also wanted to give "the 'ugly reality' of mental productions a place in psychology that it deserves" (Fitzek & Salber, 1996, p. 75). His intensive study of Freud's psychology had opened his eyes to unconscious forms of defence and sometimes seemingly crazy drives. Salber sought a model with which he could conceptualise cultivation as driven by an obsessive will to survive. He saw the associated phenomena of crisis, defence, struggle and eruptive upheavals and wanted to address them theoretically. He sought something like a procedural rule for unconscious cultivation processes.

The model that Salber outlined in 2002 and 2008 has fourteen positions instead of four, unlike the one from 1983. He designs it as a spiral with thirteen turns. The starting and ending positions have the same name: cultivation begins and ends in "unrest". In contrast to the versions of Gestalt logic, transformation, construction and paradox, the terms *unrest*, *dream logic*, *rituals*, *obsessions*, *de-alienation*, *sensitivities*, *sensual-material*, *work cultivation*, *imperfection*, *sensitive games*, *unconscious longing*, *inversion*, *free art* and, once again, *unrest* each refer to specific states of being. Thus, it can be said that in the later model, the cultivation processes appear more dramatic, existential and material than in the 1983 version model.

It is a driven, often erratic transformation with all the dramatic circumstances that accompany it. Later, viewed from a metapsychological perspective, cultivation means, for example, the formation of states that harden out of fear of

change, which accumulate until they finally shift under the pressure of fundamental circumstances and additions. In their struggle for survival, they pursue a dramatic search for an image that will allow them to survive for a longer period of time in the turbulent reality: “In order to escape its restlessness, psyche embarks on a journey through various forms of cultivation until one of them can take shape for a transformation of reality. This is how we want to be, how we want to appear, how we want to transform ourselves through our creative images...” (Salber, 2016, p. 22).

In the model that brought Gestalt and development together in 1983, the Gestalt is expressed in its inherent versions and seeks to preserve itself in a movement of unfolding, rearranging and deepening. This model does something like formalising the “ability” of Gestalt development. Accordingly, Salber formally summarised the structuring principle of this search movement as the “versality problem” (Salber, 1969a, p. 26). In the light of the cultivation spiral model that is the focus here, these are rather dramatic twists and turns of a whole with consequences for the whole. It sees Gestalt development as driven by a “restlessness in which the witch’s formula for transformation from one Gestalt to the next drives it forward” (Salber, 2002, p. 97) until it finally – for a time – manages to settle into a viable form. This formulation suggests that we should also speak of a “spiral of unrest” (Salber, 2008, p. 78). In this context, Salber no longer cited the “versality problem” as the core motif, but increasingly spoke of “survival skills” in the same regard. The same core problem is meant, but with the later designation, Salber was able to align his terminology more materially and more closely to everyday life within the framework of metapsychology, which had since become more realistic.

But let us take a closer look at the model.

4. The cultivation spiral in its individual steps

In his younger years, Salber set himself the task of transferring Goethe’s view of nature to the realm of the psyche: “morphological psychology”. Just as Goethe derived the movement of nature from the tension between the whole and its parts (versality) and a series of other fundamental tensions, Salber saw life as a system of “conditions” (Salber, 1965) or “factors” (Salber, 1969) that complement each other, as the basis for the constant change. However, in the course of his work, the pioneering work of his role model became increasingly important. This was also reflected in the fact that Salber preferred to describe his own work in later years as “psychological morphology”. In doing so, he accorded greater importance to Goethe’s way of viewing reality as a whole. This return to the visionary experience of the great observer of nature arose from Salber’s endeavour to highlight even more pointedly the basic survival skills of the psyche and to align his psychology

even more closely with material qualities of action. By returning to Goethe's ideas of a basic language of animated nature, Salber wanted to give his metapsychological considerations greater weight.

The extent to which this reorientation preoccupied him is evident, for example, in his efforts, even in the last year of his life, to trace the above-mentioned conditions and factors, which he himself had established, back to Goethe's fundamental tensions of 1810 (Salber, 2016, p. 27). However, this is also evident, as we shall see, in the cultivation spiral conceived in 2002 and 2008. Here, Salber not only breaks away from the formal framework of the four-version model by tracing the cultivation process through a total of thirteen versions, but also repeatedly alludes to Goethe's fundamental tensions in his description of these twists and turns. "The urgent and the restrained" form an overall restless rhythm. A "more and less," a "violent and moderating" seek to balance extremes through further twists and turns. "Action and resistance" transform the positions of the cultivation spiral and allow them to oscillate into one another.

The turning points marked by Salber in the spiral movement of cultivation resulting from the interaction of these conditions are now summarised in detail and, for the sake of clarity, presented by the author in three sections.

A) Violent world creation is called into question

Unrest

"Unrest" is a state of the real world, which in the biblical creation myth is also understood as the starting point for the formation of a earth: chaos. But Goethe's field of action of the fundamental tensions indicates that unrest is, on the one hand, something whose latent effect must always be assumed and, on the other hand, something that can increase from situation to situation. Stages of the day, phases of life can constellate into a restless and tense state that urgently demands to be moderated and expressed in gestalten. Restlessness refers to something like a persistent 'pregnancy' of the real world, from which new mental forms are constantly being 'born'. Such an image for the emergence of gestalten is the basis for Salber's description of the cultivation spiral as a 'creation spiral' (Salber, 2008, p. 78).

Dream logic

What is the source of the restlessness in the real world? What is holding back this urge? What form does the first step of cultivation take? Here, it makes sense to draw on the pictorial expressions of the soul in sleep – i.e. detached from the counterforce of the objective world and the rules of social coexistence: the as yet unformed restlessness urges itself into image-like qualities. This can be a flow, but also a stagnation or freezing. Accordingly, Bollas (2005) sees the first forms of cultivation in the mental life of the newborn through the style of the mother's

“being with him” (p. 46). Does the mother’s care lead to a stagnant or rather a flowing course of the shared hours? Bollas explicitly refers here to a shared “aesthetic mode” (ibid.). If we see these states as images in motion, they are associated with twists, turns and transformations. Just as in the dreams remembered in the morning, the images replace one another and merge into one another. In pictorial forms, the restlessness thus takes on an initial shape. However, the dreamlike nature of the state is still clearly evident in a quality of restlessness. No forms that can organise survival for a longer period of time have yet emerged. Therefore, “restraining” and “moderating” forces (see above) come into play and push for a second turn of the cultivation spiral.

Rituals

Rhythms such as the rhythm of the day or the body provide a useful reference point. Three meals a day at specific times help to calm a restless mind, providing a form of moderation. The same applies to hygiene rituals. Similarly, tried-and-tested patterns can calm dream-like changes and bring recurring reference points into play. They deal with reality by offering the changing whims of dream logic a “common framework” (Salber, 2008, p. 78). It is one thing to be driven from one image to the next, and it is quite another to experience the flow stabilised by recurring patterns. But such ritualised patterns also pose obstacles to some creations. They hinder effects with their own logic. They bring a “resistance” into play. Supported by the stability of rituals, the creations threaten to betray the image of their own creation.

Obsessions

Therefore, in a subsequent twist, the >flesh and blood< of the cultivating gestalt emerges with a violent upswing. It contrasts the rituals with the “intensive mode of transformation” (ibid.) of a “I” that is “I”. Through this powerful centring, the gestalt, which strives to survive in the real world, finds a felt, assertive centre. Obsession shapes the contours of the gestalt, as well as a sense of its qualities that are worth preserving. Because it brings something raw and direct into the process, the production of obsession is an often overlooked intermediate step in cultivation. But nevertheless, it can be observed everywhere. Not only in individual development, where it impresses as defiance, stubbornness and adolescent wildness. Obsessions also form in the social sphere and tear people away from the framework of conventions. On an economic level, the meteoric rise of >start-ups< – for example in the tech industry – can be attributed to this twist in the cultivation spiral. Intense to violent designs stand out, which know how to realign the behaviour and experiences of a diversity of people through a thrilling promise.

These effects highlighted by Salber’s model can be found in both early and later periods of human history. They are reflected in contemporary times in the film *American Beauty* (USA, 1999). It is an impressive and moving portrait of an

American family in which the characters free themselves from suffocating constraints and rituals by developing obsessions. They treat constraints with obsessions (Blothner, 2003, 2005).

De-alienation

However, the causal relationships brought into the world by obsessions can only be sustained in the long term if the driving force behind them becomes alien to them again and they allow moderating influences in the form of differentiation or transformation. Based on such observations, Salber marks the next turn of the cultivation spiral as a becoming alienated from oneself. This is linked to a fourth cultivation step, which he calls "de-alienation". Within the framework of the basic conditions of the real world mentioned above, psychological formations are capable of experiencing themselves as a "more", of forming a creative core that displaces everything else. But they are also capable of distancing themselves from its claim to totality, viewing it from different perspectives and dismantling it. This brings into play the universal formative direction of a "less". Without such alienation from obsessions, no stable forms of cultivation can develop.

This represents the first turn of the cultivation spiral: out of restlessness and fear, the first pictorial contours of forms emerge, which transform into recurring patterns of ritualisation and thus challenge the self-assertion of gestalten. These grow into a sometimes destructive intensity but become aware of this very quality and learn to distance themselves from it.

B) Expansion of a world misses the whole point

Sensitivities

Through their alienation, obsessions find more moderate forms of expression within the cultivation process. At the same time, other survival skills come to the fore. In sensitive movements, the cultivation forms now engage with heightened emotions and their special qualities. Banal twists and turns of everyday life are savoured and developed into events. Salber believes that, viewed from the perspective of the obsessions, they appear "like a kind of kitsch" (Salber, 2008, p. 78). For with their self-indulgent quality, they deny certain fruitful tensions. The unifying force of the obsessions is held back by sensitive gestalten, but the latter can seek to assert themselves for their own sake. Seen in this light, the next twist represents a further step in cultivation.

Sensual materiality

By increasingly incorporating material qualities of the real world into their designs, these lifestyles counteract a tendency towards self-movement with a restraining urge for grounding. Natural movements and concrete objects are given space to contribute to the design. Fundamental qualities that cannot be further

broken down and are invigorating, such as hardness, persistence, warmth and coldness, find a place in the gestalten. This gives them an immediate point of reference. A groundlessness opens up: it finds orientation in a house, a path, a helping hand. There, warmth is felt: this allows an opening. There, one encounters hardness: one cannot go any further. In this direction, the familiar spreads out and becomes unfamiliar. Sensual, material points of reference can lead away from the previous position, which was determined by a tendency towards abstract aestheticisation. A world anchored in basic qualities and concrete points of reference comes to the fore.

Work cultivation

Now the conditions are in place for cultivation to form a unified and at the same time vividly differentiated body of work. Precisely because the emerging work is grounded in the sensual and material it is able to commit itself to one of an infinite number of creative possibilities. The cultivation spiral turns into “down-to-earth joint works” (ibid.). They establish inclusions and exclusions, making clear what is dear to them. In doing so, they exhibit a flexible internal regulation that opens up circular processes and counteracts absolutisation and fixation. As a grounded and structured organisation, the work that emerges has the potential to establish itself in the real world for a long time, for example as a way of life or a cultural epoch.

Imperfections

However, the problems associated with standardisation are not resolved with the formation of works. When an effective organisation emerges from turmoil, it inevitably triggers counteractions. In the cultivation process, it becomes apparent that every decision is associated with exclusions. The work is confronted with its own construction problems and must come to terms with the fact that it can incorporate many things into its order, but cannot respond to everything. It must live with this failure and the resulting longing for wholeness. With this turn of phrase, Salber refers to the work “Civilisation and Its Discontents”, in which Freud (1930) stated that in the real world, no cultural formation is capable of solving all of life’s tasks. The inevitable failure of work formation becomes apparent in a feeling of discontent.

The four positions of the cultivation spiral described above form a second volte. After distancing itself from the intense dynamics of obsessions, it first introduces more moderate forms of expression into the development, only to weigh them down with sensual, material qualities. This shift allows a work to emerge that is able to unify the real world in a decisive yet broadly anchored manner. With the sense of imperfection comes the sobering realisation that even under these more developed conditions, no all-encompassing form can emerge. Even if cultivation

establishes *a* world, *the* world is still not available to it. Cultivation leaves behind a disturbing residue.

C) Reasoning confronts art

Sensitive games

In its forward thrust, the cultivation gestalt may attempt to replace what has been missed through demonstrated and dramatised productions. Stages are set up on which more is performed than can be achieved in everyday life. People try to "treat bliss and suffering as if they were one and the same" (Salber, 2008, p. 79). Performances spread, losing sight of their original context. Qualities of suffering are intensified in order to avoid painful confrontations elsewhere. The gestalten appear highly agile, but they move very little. In order for such a self-sustaining game to establish itself, the real world's transitions and additions must be made unconscious.

Unconscious longings

In a counter-reaction, longings for a world less defined by divisions and demonstrations emerge. This can be seen as a further attempt to create joint works, forms of organisation in which the paradoxes of reality are not split up but lived in transitional forms. The realisation dawns that unity is not possible without divisive diversity and that peaceful times are built on a constant struggle for survival. The longings take such arrangements into account, but they also highlight the enormous effort required to achieve acceptance or even realisation. There are now tendencies to avoid such work. Caught between a longing for completion and a call to work, the forms of cultivation are seeking to escape the conflict tension via a further twist.

Defensive twist

The cultivation processes can address this conflict in the form of "stubborn" reasoning. The longings are held onto. When attempts to realise them fail, endless repetitions are used to prove that this failure is not happening. For example, if the community makes enough personal sacrifices to achieve unity, the costly process of dealing with the dissatisfaction of individuals can be avoided. Or if the tendency towards decisiveness and assertiveness were banished from the world, a tension-free and peaceful age would dawn. A false order is clung to by all means. Since such arguments are directed against the order of the real world, pressure builds up, pushing for a further turn in the spiral of cultivation.

Free art

Art offers clues to this. For it succeeds in symbolically reproducing the fluid and tense reality in comprehensible works and revealing their unconscious

construction. But Salber is not only concerned with art in the narrower sense. His psychology, which emphasises the aesthetics of psyche, sees this shift as an actual step in cultivation: “This is about art that makes the fluid reality of transformation tangible (!) as a transition, as a paradox that becomes real” (ibid.). Paradoxically, the “house” in which the gestalten seek survival is all the more stable when it makes the mobility of art its own. In this final twist, the process of cultivation itself takes on the characteristics of art, at least for a time. It remains in development with the creative traits of free art.

Renewed unrest

Salber does not understand art as the comfort of beauty. It makes transitions tangible, sharpens reality and disrupts familiar orders. If it is now taken up by the gestalten of cultivation, this can once again lead to states of unrest. By marking the starting and ending points of the cultivation spiral as unrest, Salber emphasises that development does not come to a standstill. The unrest that results from cultivation over thirteen stages is different from that with which the journey began. Therefore, at this point, another spiral can begin, in which the real world is treated differently once again. Then the effort of survival must be made anew. However, it may also be that the ‘old’ culture dissolves into another, is incorporated into it, so to speak.

Salber divides the third turn of the cultivation spiral into these four positions. In their drive to survive, life forms can drive themselves into a kind of argument from which they cannot free themselves. Unless they succeed in bringing into play the art-analogous constructional features of the real world, which shake up the stagnation and set it in motion again. However, this culmination point in the search for ways to survive does not mark the end of cultivation. On the contrary, the turn to the creative forms of art once again highlights the unrest of the real world in a different way.

5. Possibilities and limitations of the cultivation spiral model

The cultivation spiral model developed by Salber in 2002/2008 does not trace any specific cultural development, such as that of Western history. Salber (1993) had already done this on a large scale with his “comic history of the soul”. The cultivation spiral is rather to be understood as a structural logic that seeks to intervene in the development of concrete impact units – the shaping of a life (Blothner, 2023), the development of a company, a defined subculture. As such, it repeatedly draws empirical configurations into its logic, into its additions and twists. In other words, concrete forms seek to emerge from the field of tension of the reality in order to survive in it, and the twists and turns of the cultivation spiral offer themselves as a means of structuring their path.

The model is noticeable in overall cultural development, but the latter is too complex to be summarised by it alone. For example, the effect of the shifts in the first phase (see 5. A above) can be seen in the unity movements of the 20th century (socialist world revolution, National Socialist Gleichschaltung and purges), which were pursued with power and the utmost consistency, and in their transformation: Cultivation-Gestalten break away from ritualised orders by developing into all-encompassing obsessions, which then become alien to them again in view of the destruction they cause. Similarly, in the agitated culture of performance of our time, the relishing of psychological dramas in the media, one could recognise the position of “sensitive games” from which longings for a different cultural order arise (see 5. C above). However, the analogy between concrete contemporary history and the cultivation spiral cannot be taken much further.

Salber's model may prove effective in changes in contemporary society and allow us to gain a rough idea of the necessary shifts that are coming into play, but cultural development does not simply follow the sequence he typified with his cultivation spiral. The model does not trace history. It should be understood as a construct that conveys an approximate idea of the psyche's attempts to survive in the turmoil of reality through creativity. Accordingly, Fitzek has described the developmental drive of contemporary society as an expression of a complex “metamorphosis of what has become, developmental structures and scope for new formations” (Fitzek, 2021, p. 38), in which several fairy-tale-like patterns of gestalt also intertwine. This approach is more in line with the methodological requirements of a concrete, psychological cultural investigation.

It was mentioned above that, as he grew older, Salber urged for the inner logic of the psyche to be expressed more adequately in conceptual terms. He was concerned with a metapsychology of psychic existence that did not close its eyes to the bizarre, banal and, in certain circumstances, thoroughly repulsive qualities of life. In this context, the geometric features (“hexagram”, “rhombus”) of his early models tended to merge into forms of representation and concepts that took into account the disruptive, material and dramatic features of the struggle for survival of gestalten. With the cultivation spiral, Salber also intended to transform the field of tension between six basic directions of gestalt – the so-called “factors” of impact units – which he had outlined in earlier publications (e.g. Salber, 1969a) into a rotating figure that was closer to the phenomena. This was because it lent itself to being extracted from the overall context of psychological morphology as a formal “hexagram”. By juxtaposing this formalisation with the rotations of a cultivation spiral, Salber (2008) sought to counteract the tendency towards abstraction.

It was pointed out at the outset that Salber's cultivation spiral has features of the approximate, the wild and the mannerist. As such, it resembles the symbolic

reproductions of reality through art. In this context, the present essay sees the fourteen positions of the spiral depicted here as a typified 'vortex', which seeks to draw the psychic gestalten into its twists and turns as they make their way through reality. The mind's creations must grapple with such interrelated additions, twists and transformations if they are to ensure their survival in a turbulent reality.

Summary

Gestalt was a central concept in Wilhelm Salber's Psychological Morphology from the very beginning. By applying this to complex life histories and social contexts, he asked himself how constant change and the development of such complex structures can be theoretically understood. In the model of the "Cultivation Spiral", Salber found a theoretical-methodological approach in the last years of his work to analyse the struggle for survival of psychic gestalten, which is challenging to constant transformation. Even though this model was never presented in detail by Salber himself, it paints a picture of the human mind that can be understood as a valuable contribution to psychological Gestalt theory.

Keywords: cultivation, change, art of psychic survival

Zusammenfassung

Gestalt war von Anfang an ein zentraler Begriff in der Psychologischen Morphologie Wilhelm Salbers. Indem er diesen auf komplexe lebensgeschichtliche und gesellschaftliche Zusammenhänge anwandte, stellte sich für ihn die Frage, wie sich der stete Wandel, wie sich die Entwicklungen solch komplexer Gebilde theoretisch fassen lassen. In dem Modell der "Kultivierungsspirale" fand Salber in den letzten Jahren seines Schaffens einen theoretisch-methodischen Ansatz, den zu steter Verwandlung herausfordernden Überlebenskampf psychischer Gestalten zu analysieren. Auch wenn dieses Modell von Salber selbst nie ausführlich dargestellt wurde, malt es doch ein Bild vom Seelischen, das man als einen wertvollen Beitrag zur psychologischen Gestalt Theorie verstehen kann.

Schlüsselwörter: Kultivierung, Verwandlung, Überlebenskünste des Psychischen

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