

New phenomenology an advance for the gestalt approach?

The founders of Gestalt Therapy have left us with a number of theoretical islands in the sea of the gestalt approach, but also included are the theoretical insecurity, gaps and inconsistencies. What do we have to accept? What do we have to comply? What new results may have an effect or repercussion?

Fritz Perls wrote: "We are still a long way from understanding the interrelations between [...] organismic and personal behavior." (Perls 1981, 289).

And: "I hope that we will someday have a language and terminology suitable to the holistic concept." (Perls 1981, 181).

We are still searching for that adequate holistic language. I will tell you, what I found in the New Phenomenology.

One of the theory of gestalt therapy is based on phenomenology.

Among phenomenologists, it was mainly Husserl and Heidegger Merleau-Ponti, who was considered relevant for gestalt therapy.

The New Phenomenology of Hermann Schmitz, based on philosophers like Aristotle, Fichte, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger and Klages. He has been evolving the new phenomenology since 1964 and the New Phenomenology differs from other philosophical approaches in that it is orientated around experience and applicability.

Schmitz enabled people to accountably speak about the impartial experience of life, and with that, stemming from what we can sense with our own felt-bodies ("Leib"), opened up new and large fields of reality and holistic thinking: felt-body, feelings, atmospheres and situations.

Although the felt-body is a significant topic within traditional phenomenology, the Schmitzsche analysis of physical condition puts the development of this topic on a new level. This analysis provides the conception for numerous 'body-centred' methods and special gestalt therapy, and it is by no means chance that doctors and therapists recite and discuss it.

Like Fritz Perls, Hermann Schmitz opposes a description of the world that is informed exclusively by scientific concepts. He refers, among other things, to the gestalt psychological foundations of "wholeness".

As well as Fritz Perls Hermann Schmitz criticized the reductionism of the science and the depth psychological idea of an inner world and he also refers to Eastern philosophies such as of yin and yang.

New phenomenology also supports the holistic, existential, and experimental perspectives of gestalt therapy.

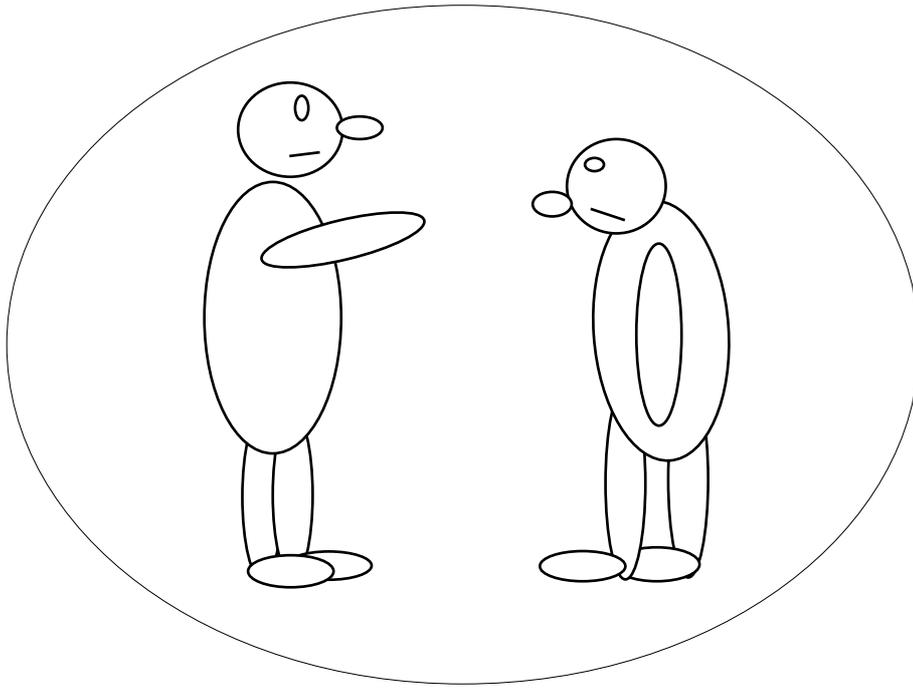
I will therefore proceed to connect the language of New Phenomenology with the concepts of gestalt therapy.

1. Situations - nothing is single

Perls wrote that everything is based on consciousness (Perls, 1974, 52) and that nothing exists beyond consciousness (Perls, 1980, 253).

Schmitz, however, showed that the basic of experiencing and accessing oneself and the world is neither consciousness nor awareness, but bodily (leibliche) phenomena caused by meaningful impressions.

Meaningful impressions are situations.



Meaningful impression

When we encounter in environment, we encounter a completely whole. Initially, it is not divided - in nothing individual. We get a "undivided" impression. What takes place in a situation happens. In it is best if nothing distinguished. The situation fully inclusive and not divided into individual elements. Schmitz calls it absolutely.

The time is not yet divided into before and later. The recognition of past and future and single requires explication. The world confronts us as a whole. Everything is absolutely and needs to be qualified to understand me in the world.

Situations are originally primarily and fundamental holistic form of experience. Situations are within diffusely, delimited and chaotic.

The way to capture situations is only possible about impressions as holistic or segmented situation.

Situations are characterised by a unified entity that stands out from the environment, meaningfulness consisting of facts, programmes, and problems; situations have 'something to say'; diffusion within the situation : not everything contained can be listed as single items; meaningfulness is dissolved in chaotic manifoldness.

Our own language is a typical situation: we move through our mother tongue without paying attention to precise rules or to the etymological derivation of a term that we are using.

Nothing is to capture singular. It is not possible to reflect the complete situation with constellations, because you never will capture the whole situation.

Every contact is a situation and starts with a level of involuntary corporeal affection. Situations are temporal current and situations have an outlasting background.

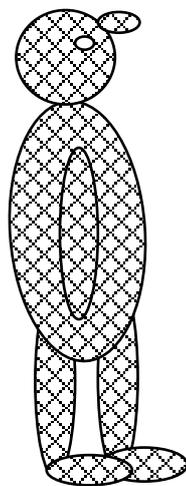
There is no distinction between foreground and background. A situation is something in which you are in, before any separation happen by an explicating talk. It is not the same than a field, but both have a topological basis.

2. The physical and the felt body are different

In gestalt therapy we believe that contact is experienced homeostatically and self-regulating at the boundary between the individual/organism and the environment.

New Phenomenology with its concept of vital drive and bodily communication offers a very different description of self - regulation of and contact and boundaries .

A key element of the New Phenomenological is, that any involuntary affection is corporeal. It is a felt/sense on the body and is seen as the primary matter of experience. At this point, there is no distinction between subject and object and pre-personal. In order to make this statement it possible to follow I will start by outlining the distinction between (physical) body and "felt body".



(physical) body

a) According to Schmitz, the body comprises the physiological realm. Position, distances, and boundaries can be precisely identified via the senses of touch and vision as well as through examination. The body is solid and has surfaces that serve as boundaries. Everything is relatively and determinably located.

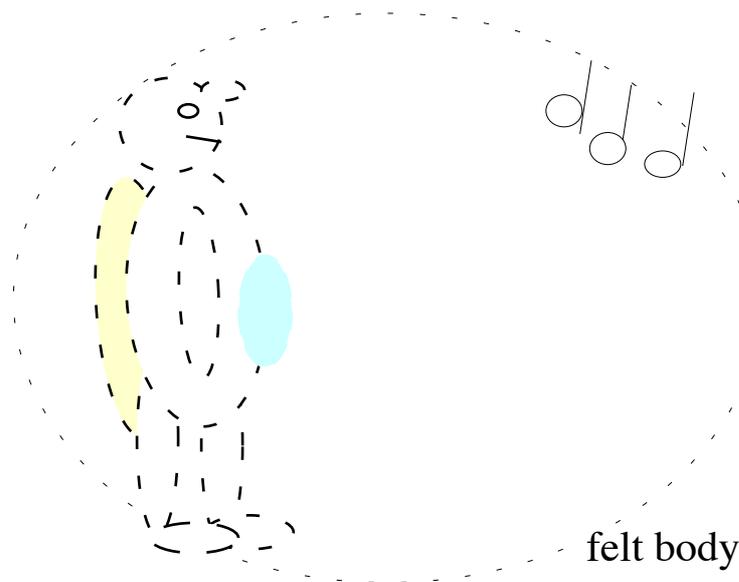
Through our physiological, biological body we can perceive and describe "contact at the (body) boundary".

b) The German term "Leib" can be translated as "felt body", it means what a person feels with and on the surface of his/her body. It does not mean the feelings inside the body.

"Felt body" refers to the feeling or sense of one's own body which is at the center of perception.

"Felt body is anything in the environment of your body (not necessarily within its boundaries) that you can feel or perceive as belonging to yourself without needing to base this feeling on your senses, especially your sense of vision or touch, or on the perceptive body concept gained from experience." (Schmitz 2011, 8)

Schmitz describes the structures of the felt body, which do not correspond to the structures of the body. It is therefore useful to differentiate between physical body and felt body.



Much rather, the felt body is a feeling body its mode of existence cannot be separated from its becoming manifest to the conscious subject in specific kinds of corporeal feeling.

Perls, in contrast, refers to sensory awareness in relation to the sensory system of perception (sense of sight, hearing, touch) for exterior object perception and the proprio-perceptive system of self-perception.

Unlike the body, the felt body can be neither seen nor touched. However, it can be very much perceived and felt. In an encounter the felt body expands to form a surface-free space, comparable with sound or silence. It also has no boundary. The felt body therefore does not allow for "contact at the boundary" as it always refers to an unmediated and holistic perceivable stirring on the body - that cannot be clearly limited, for example when someone is startled or becomes panic. Schmitz assumes that all human experience originates in the perception of one's own felt body and corporeal affectedness. This becomes most clear in the case of a newborn baby. The baby perceives pain and shock immediately on his/her own body and there is no conscious about, what it is.

3. Self-ascribe needs affected involvement.

Perception of one's own body and affected involvement precede being a conscious subject, for without perception of one's own body and affected involvement, everything would be immersed in homogenous neutrality.

In order to gain access to and distance from experience, one needs not only affected involvement but also the ability to ascribe something to oneself. Without this ability, one would never think that anything refers to oneself.

This is why a person needs to be a conscious subject with the ability to self-ascribe (Schmitz 2011, 71). However, self-ascription is not organismic and the result of a conscious contact. It is the accumulative result of completed personal processing of affected involvement.

This ability to self-ascribe is essential. Without it there could be no self-consciousness. Affected involvement as corporeal experience mediated directly by the self-consciousness that what I experience is about me.

4. Subject facts are not a part of the inner world

Affected involvement is not caused by a drive or a feeling located in oneself. Subjective facts are not a part of the inner world, but and subjectivity are in the facts, programs and problems. Subjectivity is not an attribution from subjects, but an attribute of facts, programmes and problems. If these subjective facts are meaningful to the subject they cause affected involvement.

The idea that the inner world, the soul and therefore subjectivity may not reside within the person but in the facts, programs, and problems does initially contradict our held beliefs.

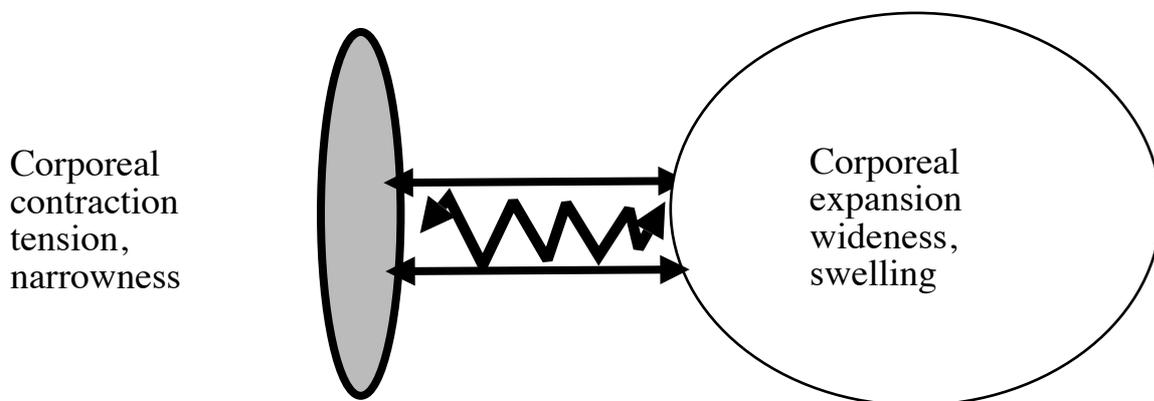
Yet if we ask ourselves in cases of personal affected involvement where the anger or disappointment originate, we will soon realize that this subjective facts reality/truth, usually a problem, that functions as trigger – we do not carry the feeling inside ourselves from the outset. This concept also alters our perspective on the location and trigger of the suffering a subject may experience in itself and his/her relations to other people, systems, and his/her environment.

(That means: The person has conscious not be conscious about the sense or the felt on the body, which are perceived through affected involvement and through the subject's ability to self-ascribe.)

5. The vital drive is a process of narrowness and wideness

To describe the origin of growth, Perls used an organismic homoeostasis model with a tendency towards establishing balance (homoeostasis).

Schmitz, on the other hand, describes a vital drive as the basis for human growth. This drive is initially undirected. The vital drive acts as a continuous, crossed into each other corporeal dynamic of contraction as tension or narrowing and expansion as swelling or widening. It is therefore more of an oscillation between contraction and expansion than a search for balance.

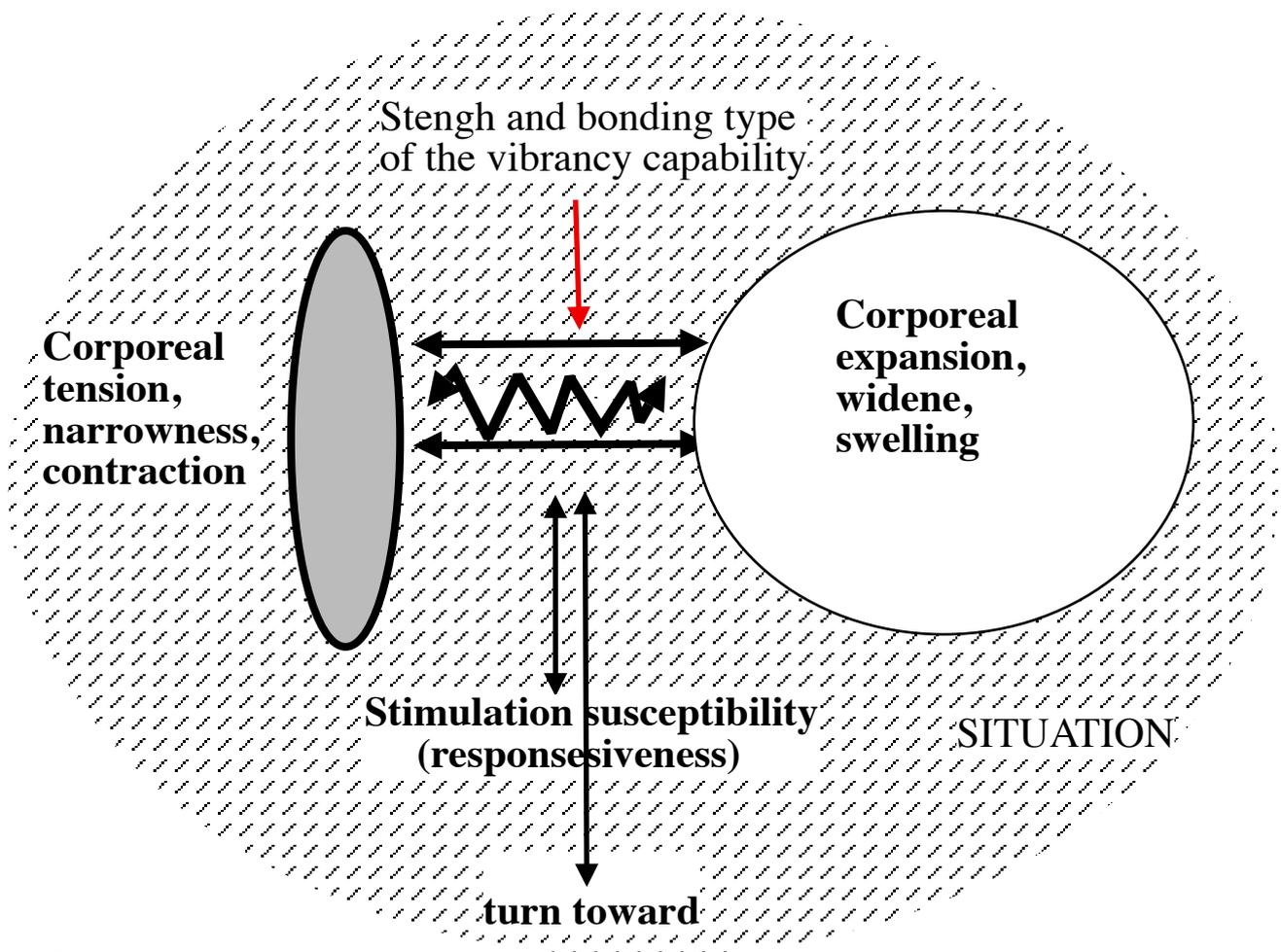


Shares could be cleaved and becomes unhooked in this oscillation between narrowness and expansion, for example, when a person experiences a severe shock or panic, the drive is paralyzed or freezes up. (Schmitz called it - privative narrowness),

During snoozing or sleeping the vital drive slackens . (Schmitz called it private widening). First and foremost, being corporeal means moving between narrowness (tension) and expansion (swelling) without detaching from either narrowness or expansion, at least for the duration of conscious experience (Schmitz, 1992, 45).

The vital drive has a dialogical character. This dynamic is not propelled by urges and instincts, but by the corporeal disposition of the vital drive. The drive's dynamic, partly contracting and partly expanding, causes an antagonistically competing rhythm of narrowness (for example when a person is shocked) and expansion, when a person experiences joy or feels open). We all can understand and experience this dynamic corporeally through tension (contractive) and swelling (expansive) if we follow our breath. Also in every situation we can feel it on our own bodies - not on the physical body. During inhalation becomes the body widens/ swells. The felt body feels tension or narrowness. During exhalation is the body experience contraction/tension. The felt body feels relaxe and get wideness. What makes this drive vital is its susceptibility to stimulation is called stimulation susceptibility and its ability to turn toward these stimuli.

Vital drive model



6. Types of bonding influence susceptibility and to toward

Strength and intensity of each person's stimulation susceptibility and ability to turn toward stimuli are influenced by different types of bonding how they are connected with contraction or narrowness and swelling or wideness of the vital drive. There are different types of bonding.

- Bathmodynamic bond

The bond can be rather compact, hard to set in motion emotionally and reacting with a kind of jerking explosion..

- Cyclodynamic bond

It can be oscillating and easy to impress, with alternating phases of narrowness and wideness involving strong stimulation susceptibility and ability to turn toward stimuli.

- Schizodynamic bond

The bond can be fragile and loose, with emotional responses tending toward a separation of narrowness and wideness and expansion.

These different types of bonding influence a person's way of handling intentions, desires, wants, and actions, as well as her/his response ability. They can also be used diagnostically.

Vitality and the vital drive with its different types of bonding are considered as corporeal disposition. Schmitz describes their coaction as pre-personal because the corporeal dynamic is usually not controlled by consciousness.

7. Corporeal communication is the basic of contact

Other than the organismic self-regulation (according to Perls), whose impulse requires a stimulus or need. The corporeal dynamic is a relatively independent, pre-personal process. At the outset, the vital drive has not direction or object. Only when the vital drive becomes susceptible (for example, through affected involvement) and turns toward these stimuli. The vital drive's response to a stimulus does not occur in sequence, but simultaneously – synchronously, as it were. Schmitz calls this process of resonance "encorporation". It happens coactively, without any latency period and without the person becoming aware of it. As a rule, encorporation is pre-personal, that means, not conscious.

It happens, for example, when people pass by each other on a busy street without colliding.

A shared and common drive that happens simultaneously causes mutual encorporation.

Corporeal communication affects the being as a whole and does thus replace the signal transmission of individual physical stimuli from the inner world or the environment through individual sensory organs.

The felt body is not bound by anatomical limits. It can transcend those barriers, for example through the senses of smell and hearing. In the interaction with others, this leads to the emergence of a shared, common felt body.

Schmitz calls this process "mutual encorporation."

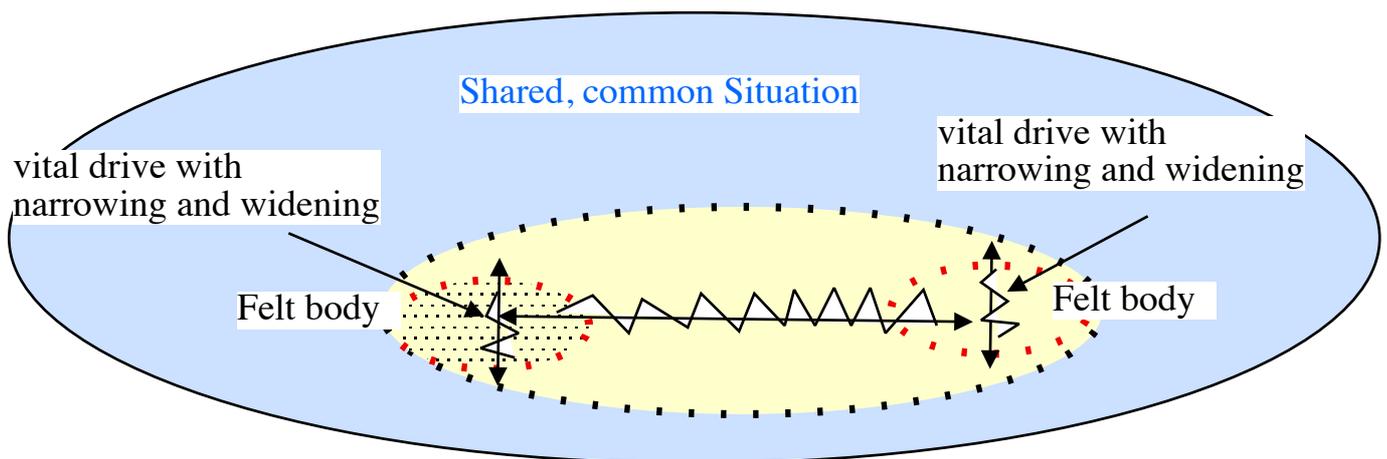
Encorporation happens not only between human beings, but also between human beings and animals, plants, images, and objects.

This gives the concept of incorporation a dimension beyond the social. The following example may serve to illustrate this concept: An exchange of gazes is involved when a person moves aside to avoid an object or another person. This sidestepping can only happen if you perceive more than you see with your eyes. You coact with what you perceive and can this act without any response time. Perception, then, comprises not only the absorption and processing of signals, but also a form of coaction of a person as a perceiver and what he perceived. This means that we do not **make** experiences but instead the experiences happen to us.

The guiding symptom of mutual incorporation is coaction without response time. Instances of this include the coaction of rider and horse, or when felt bodies coact through their vital drive as in rowing, dancing, etc. This incorporation/embodiment is mutual.

Corporeal communication and the process of mutual incorporation transcend the dualism as the separation between inner and outer world becomes obsolete. Incorporation can also happen unilaterally – when we are fascinated or watch someone as solidary incorporation, e.g. when we sing in a choir.

Almost all perception happens via incorporation through corporeal communication.



8. Movement and synthetic characters are bridging qualities of incorporation

Incorporation also happens via so-called near-corporeal bridging qualities, which evoke corporeal stirrings.

a) Bridging qualities can be movement suggestions by inert or moving gestalts and gestalt progressions in nature, architecture, and spaces as well as in gestures or rhythm - that cause corporeal stirrings. There a difference between walking down the dark cellar steps and looking out over the ocean, between listening to a military march or a lullaby.

b) Synesthetic characters are another bridge quality

Music, too, can be linked with images. Shapes we see in landscapes have the effect of sensory qualities and generate atmospheres as feelings that can be experienced as corporeal stirrings.

c) combinations of sensory impressions as in poetry

for example: You taste the flower, and smell from the green and the sun is laughing - is it life or a dream.

d) decorporation

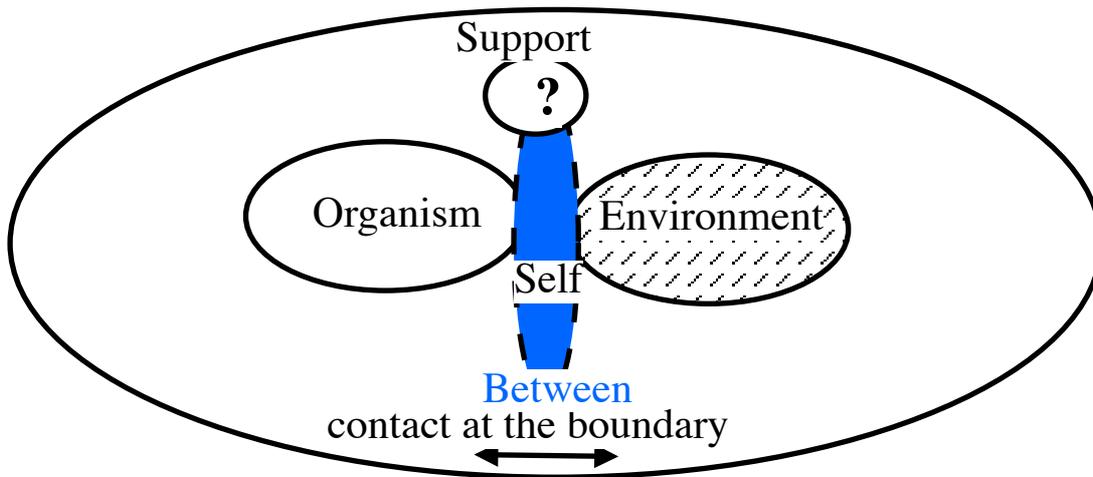
In addition to incorporation, there can also be decorporation, e.g., when you are driving a car and realize that you've driven quite a distance without really noticing it. A special form of decorporation consists in surrendering to a sensory quality, e.g. when you lose yourself in a green hue, are enraptured by a scent, etc.

9. Epicritical and protopathic a different kind of pain

Following the British neurologist Sir Henry Head, we may differentiate between epicritic and protopathic corporeal stirrings. Epicritic stirrings are sharp, pointy, piercing (e.g., a mosquito bite), protopathic stirrings are blurred, dull, blunt (e.g., abdominal queasiness, a relaxed face). (Schmitz, 2009, p. 37). They are partially perceivable on the felt body as "felt body islands". The epicritical may become visible in a person's bearing and behaviour as contraction, abruptness, target-directedness while the protopathic may become visible as blurriness, a lack of structure and flexibility.

In gestalt therapy this opens up numerous opportunities to work with these polarities on the levels of felt body and behaviour.

10. Personal regression and personal emancipation the basis of development

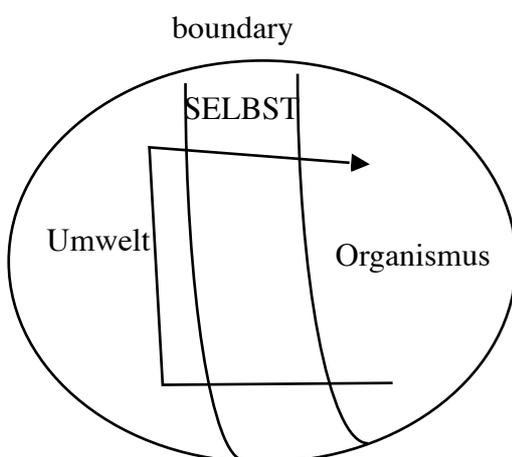


Organism model and contact "between" on the boundary

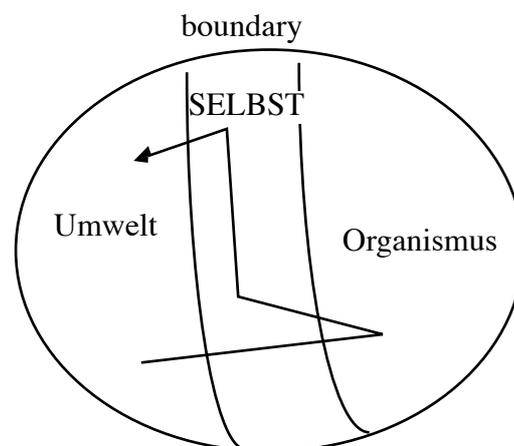
We further believe that the contact experience itself belongs neither to the organism nor to the environment (Perls 1980, 121), but is located in between.

We need a more holistic and phenomenological description for this contact experience at the boundary and the interaction between individuum and field ; There must be a place of "between-ness" that is neither organism nor environment, where the person can feel the experience and relate to it.

Gordon Wheeler wrote a lot about the between and the support in the field. Gabriel Traverso's from Chile chart can be used to illustrate a concept of the experience taking place in the spacebetween.



Funktionaler Zyklus
vom Organismus ausgehend



Interpersonaler Zyklus
von der Umwelt ausgehend

nach Gabriel Traverso, in
Gestalttherapie 1/2011, S. 98 f

The chart shows the access of needs through an exterior stimulus and the need of the organism as interior stimulus while the contact takes place at the boundary, with the space between as location for the contact experience.

The difficulty, however, is that the organism perceives this space between even though the experience of the space between cannot be assigned to the organism or the environment .

Schmitz offer a new way to describe the contact on the boundary, by providing a possible differentiation between “Körper” as physical body and “Leib” as “felt body”.

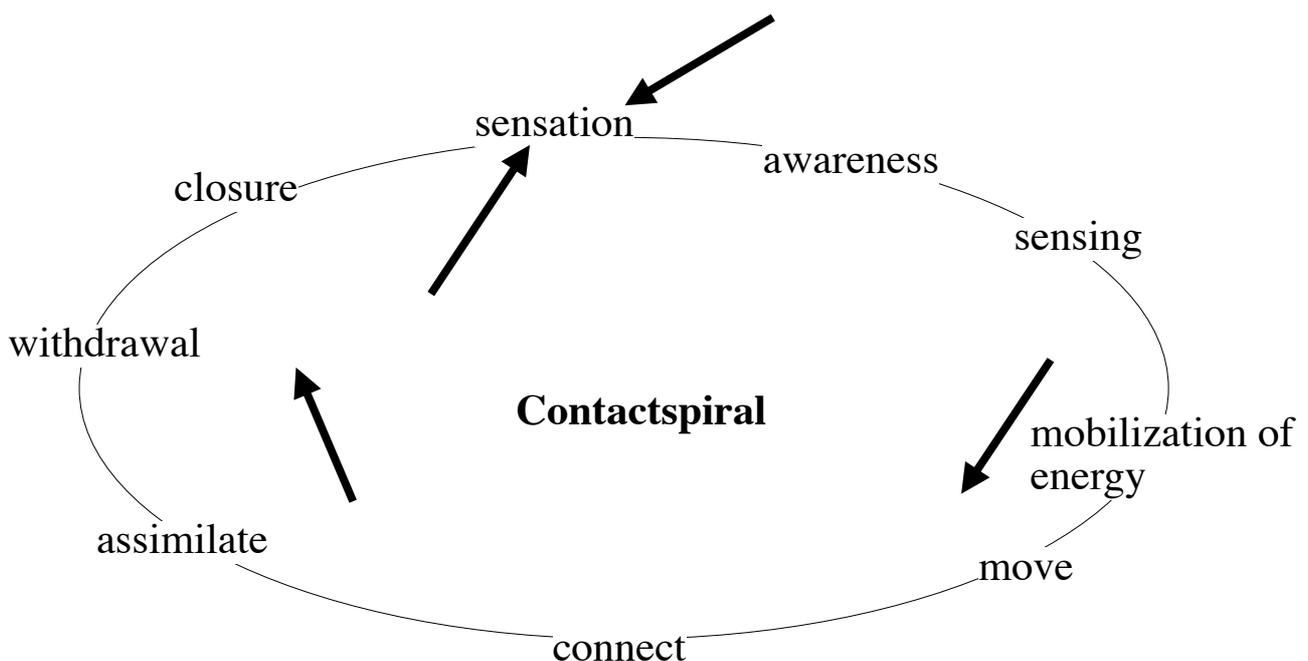
The concept of corporeality has described by the philosoph Merleau-Ponty, though not consistently enough to solve for example the problem of the space between and the boundary.

The felt body is a central concept in the New Phenomenology, allowing for a new and clear description of the contact at the boundary based on phenomenological terms.

The vital drive’s stimulation susceptibility and its ability to turn towards these stimuli allow a description for corporeal communication and pre-personal (non-conscious) contact.

11. Contact cycle or personal regression and personal emancipation?

In the gestalt therapy we also use the shape of circles for the declaration of the contact process. The Gestalt cycle is a mixture of psychological and physiological processes whose process is indeed self-evident and understandable, but some theoretical uncertainties include. This can be illustrated more clearly by the approach of a new phenomenology.

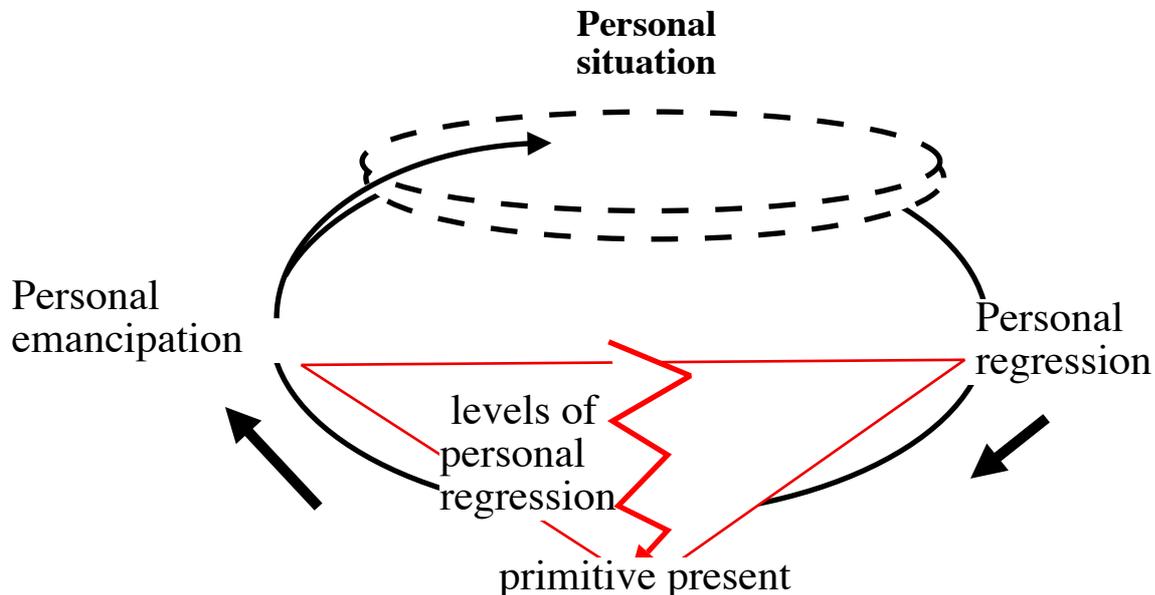


based on Institute of Cleveland, program 2008

12. The process of personal regression and personal emancipation

In addition to the corporeal dynamic there is a continuous process of personal regression and personal emancipation. Together with the corporeal dynamic it forms the basis for contact and development in shared situation.

Through the process of personal regression and personal emancipation develops the personal situation (personality).



Without personal emancipation, a human being would remain animalistic and not become a person; without personal regression, a human being would remain uninvolved. Schmitz describes personal regression as corporeal affectedness on various levels, from feeling meant to extreme affected involvement and corporeal contraction. Schmitz calls it "primitive present".

13. Primitive presence is absolute contact

Primitive present is a process of contraction and narrowness.

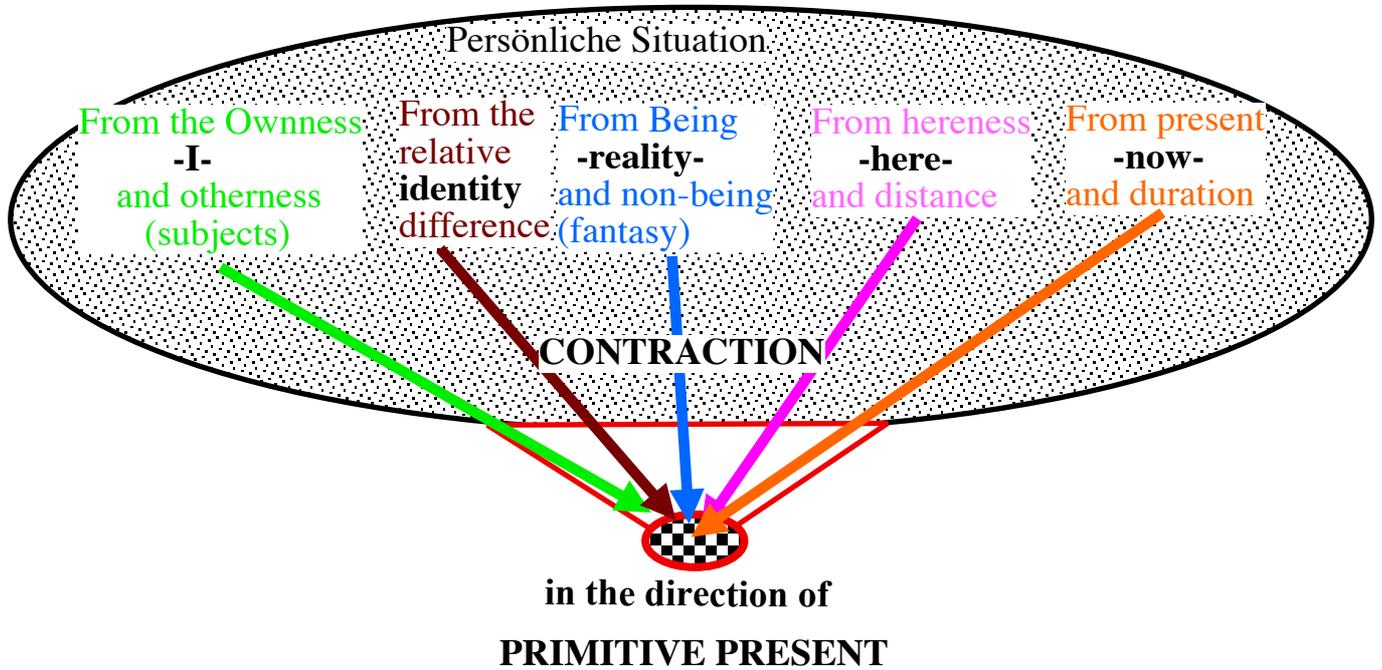
-“Primitive present” means the imprisonment in corporeal-affected involvement caused by something sudden and intense happening. In this state of imprisonment, immediate self-distancing is not or only partly possible. Factors like here and now, being and non-being, present and duration, as well as the usual flexibility become thus inaccessible in extreme states, for example., when a person is shocked. In that moment, the person is just subject in itself. Identity and contact are undifferentiated. They are absolute because the person has not yet gained distance from the immediate experience.

In the primitive present everything is melt together into a non-differentiable subject. Nothing is singular. Everything is a holistic, diffuse or chaotic meaningfulness. (Schmitz, 2009, S. 47) The primitive present is a not-yet-differentiated contact. It is therefore also described as **absolute** contact (Matthies, 2013, p. 87).

If differentiation is not or only partly possible, there is a more or less all-encompassing corporeal affectedness towards the primitive present.

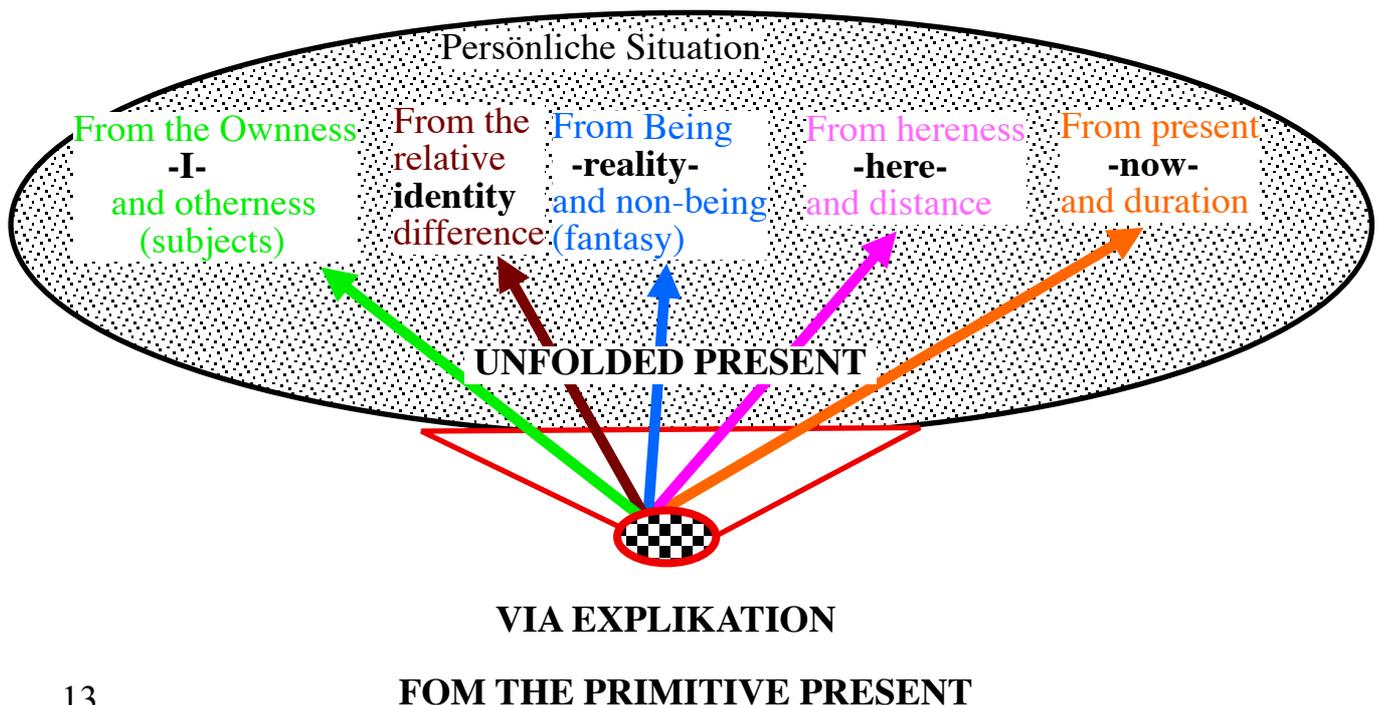
Process of personal regression

In the primitive present everything (I, identity, reality, here and now) is melt together into a non-differentiable subject. Nothing is singular. Identity and contact are absolute, undifferentiated and undivided without interpretation.



Process personal emancipation

In order to escape the primitive present and absolute contact one, must gain distance from affective involvement. That is the process of personal emancipation.



14. To take distance requires explication and implication

Differentiation and distancing can take place on the levels of identity (absolute/relative) and difference, ownness (subjective) and objectively, present and duration, hereness and distance, being and non-being (fantasy).

It happens as explication and implication that take the form of an unfolding of the primitive present, for example: through the neutralization and attribution of meaning to the acts.

Corporeal affectedness is relativized into separate facts/circumstances. This results in a relative, conscious contact that allows the person to respond consciously to the situation.

This is the phase where life techniques, coping strategies, contact function such as deflection, confluence, etc. as well as personal programs and problems belong, also intentions, and wills and wishers.

Boundary building is thus more of a differentiated, conscious effort of avoidance, acceptance, or delineation/differentiation. Potential contact boundaries and life strategies result from the strength or differentiation and the way that meaning and corporeal dispositions – including their bonding types – are being dealt with. All these form the undertone of personal development.

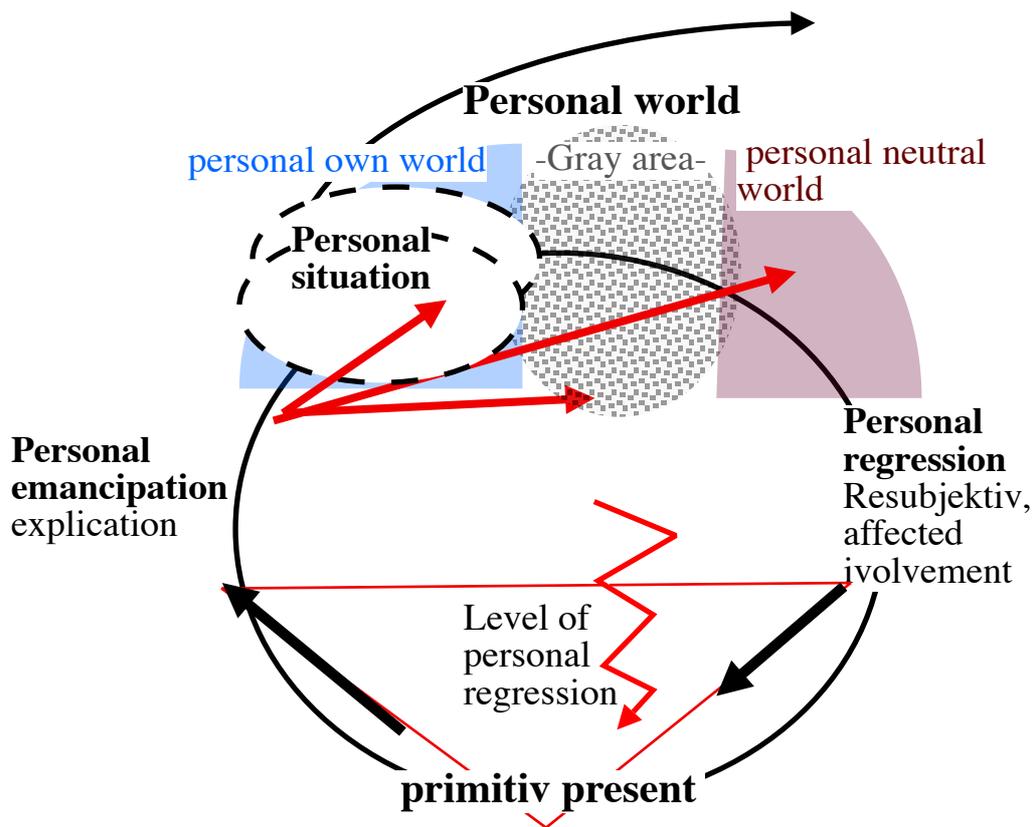
15. The personal world has subjectiv, objectiv and gray parts

Schmitz divides the personal world into a subjective personal own world, a neutral, objectified personal objective world, and a grey area where subjective and neutral haven't yet been determined or are in competition and where demarcations and differentiations take place.

The personal world is more than the personality or personal situation. (In the conception of Schmitz personality and the personal situation are identical.)

The boundaries between personal own world and personal objective world and the grey area may be either rigid or permeable. The two worlds may also mix.

Process personal regression, personal emancipation and the personal world



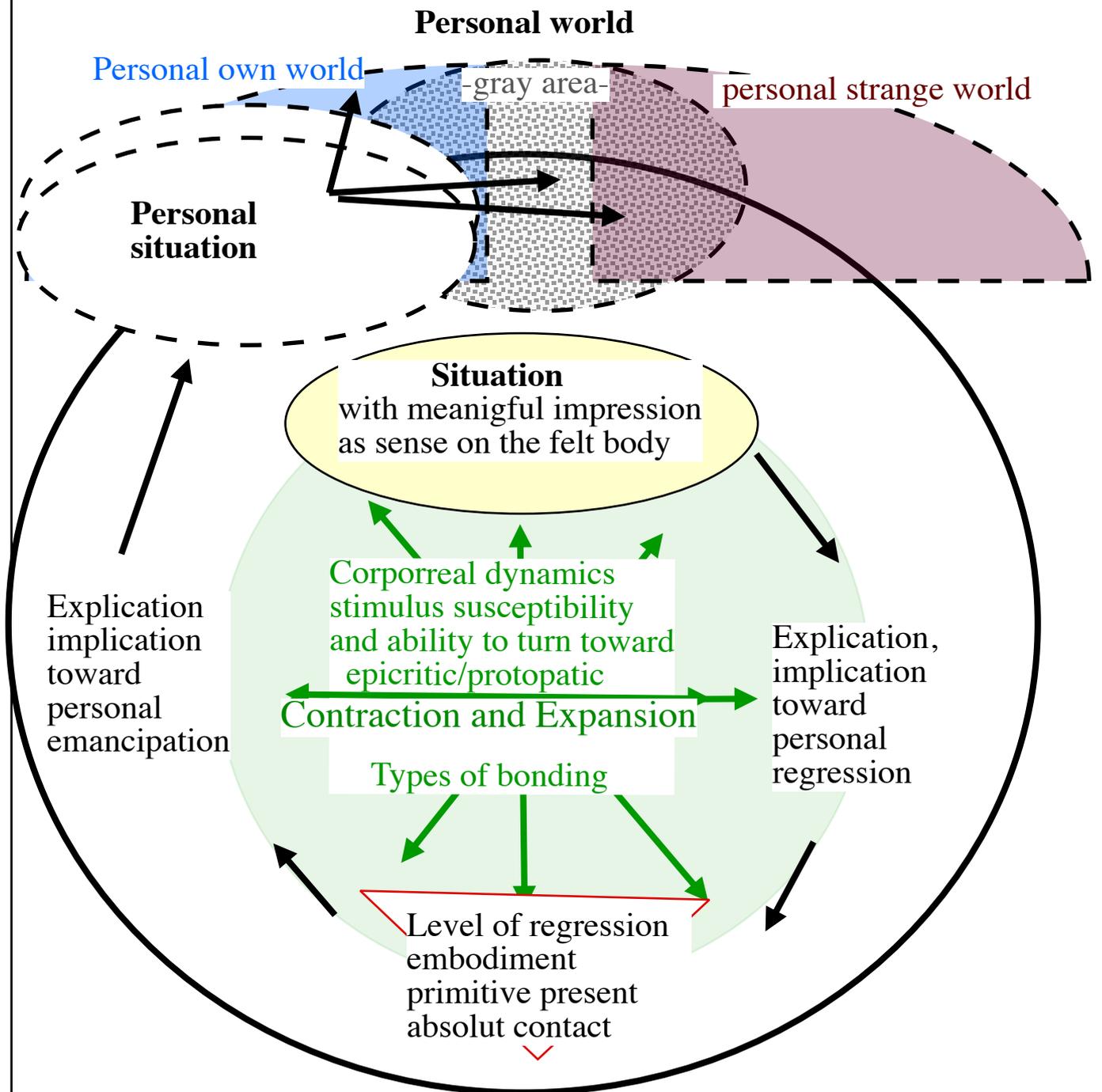
The classification of meaning and the response to it, takes place in the personal world.

The partially merging of parts from the own world in the objective world and parts of the objective world into the own world. It reminds of introjection and projection but it is not comparable. However, what we are talking about here is the explication of affected involvement and the allocation to the personal own world or the personal objective world.

By entering the personal world, experiences lose their previously explicated singularity and get immersed in the diffuse whole of the personal situation. They merge with preceding experiences, get connected, and are at first forgotten. It could be said that they form a background. "Comparable with a viscous mass in which countless other viscous masses are gliding around and influencing each other." (Schmitz 2005, 93)

The meanings of explicated details continue to act as crystalizing cores of memory, as partial situations within the personal situation. They become part of the interior diffuse situation with its viscous masses. The meanings can be re-subjectified again and again in varying contexts. Personal experiences aren't "stored" in the unconscious or a soul. Memory is like language. Words and sentences aren't stored anywhere, either. They are created in the act of speaking or remembering.

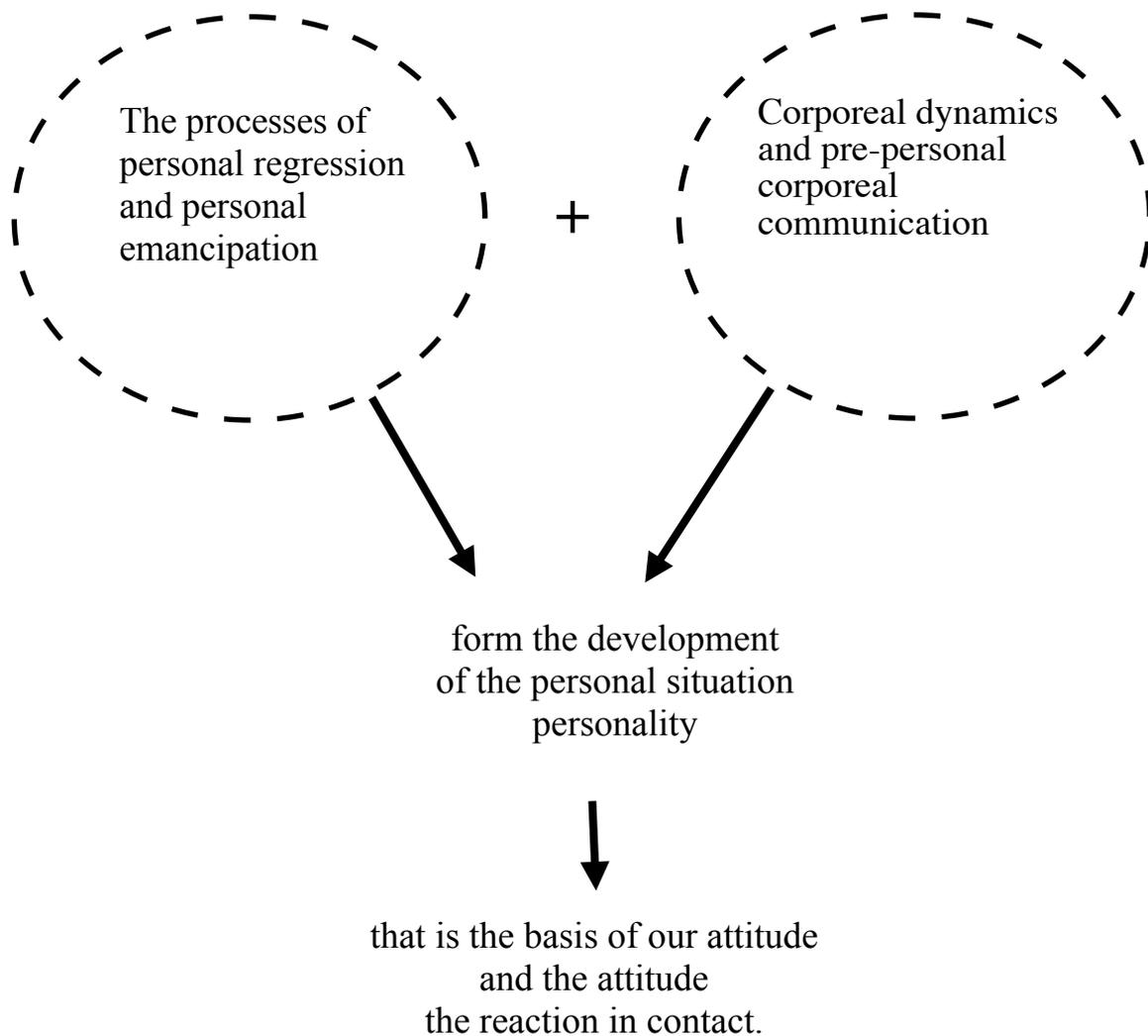
Overview: personal regression/personal emancipation, personal world and corporeal dynamic



This overview illustrates the two levels of the corporeal dynamic and the process of personal regression and personal emancipation as a simultaneous process.

It is the core of the personal own world. The personal situation (personality) evolves through a process of personal regression and personal emancipation.

16. Summery



- “One’s personal situation (personality) unfolds endlessly throughout one’s life story through processes of personal regression and personal emancipation, of explication and implication in the face of challenges .” (Schmitz 2009, 103)
- Corporeal dynamics and corporeal communication form the pre-personal undertone of personal development.
- This concepts allows for a differentiated, “phenomenological” diagnostic and therapeutic interventions.

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