



Kurt Guss

Fourty Years Ago – About The Foundation Period

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm very happy to be here because this convention reminds me of the time exactly 40 years ago and of the fact that I survived this time which was extremely difficult for me. Let me talk to you first about the very beginning of our society! How did this society arise?

Having finished my PhD I looked for a publisher who could and would print my PhD thesis about educational psychology. I met *Hans-Jürgen Walter* who worked as lecturer for the famous publishing house *Ernst Klett* in Stuttgart. Following a recommendation by my PhD supervisor *Wolfgang Metzger* I also met – *Jürgen Steinkopff*, the first publisher of *Metzger's* great book »Psychology« which us students called »the bible«.

I had lots of inspiring conversations with *Jürgen Steinkopff* and *Hans-Jürgen Walter*. In the course of these conversations we developed the plan to maintain the ideas of *Max Wertheimer*, *Kurt Koffka*, and *Wolfgang Köhler* by establishing an organisation. This organisation, the later »Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications« was assigned to produce an official Journal, later called »Gestalt Theory«, and a series of publications around the theory of Gestalt. I soon became editor of the »Red books of Gestalt theory«, which got their name from the red cover of UTB-Paperbacks. Four of those books had been published last century, another four of them this century. This was the first one, published in 1975. This is the most recent one, published a couple of month ago. (See next two pages!)

The actual father, the spiritual mover of this society and of its official journal is without any doubt *Jürgen Steinkopff*.

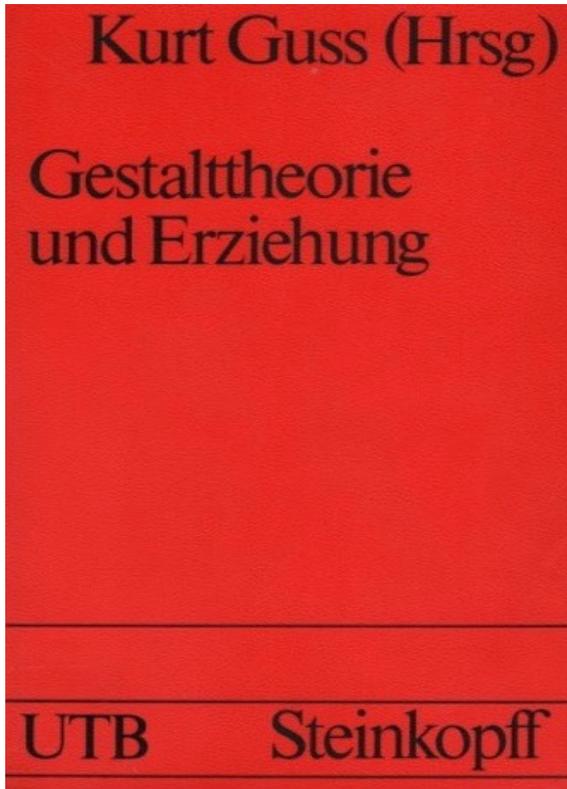
Therefore his name should be mentioned in the »Founders and Honorary Board« of our journal »Gestalt Theory«.

Therefore Jürgen Steinkopff should be appointed Honorary President.

Therefore I repeat today my suggestion to establish a »Jürgen Steinkopff Award«.

Now I would like to talk about the most important people of the foundation time. *Wolfgang Metzger* had two famous teachers: *Wolfgang Köhler* and *Max Wertheimer*. Nevertheless he was an extremely modest character, very simple and

very straight. One day I talked to him about different theories of education. Finally *Metzger* said: »Hiermit haben Sie mich zu Ihrem Doktorvater ernannt! – Now you have appointed me as your doctoral supervisor!«



The very first one from 1975

Kurt Guss (Hg.)
Psychologische
Forschung
Jahrgänge 1922–1938



Heureka!
Verlag der Ostwestfalen-Akademie

The most recent one from 2019

Working on my thesis I was allowed to call *Metzger* whenever I needed help. On a Sunday morning – I used to only get up at noon at that time – I called *Metzger* und he gave me the advice I needed. At the end of my call I politely said: »Hopefully I did not bother you!« *Metzger's* answer: »Of course you did! The soup is already cold!« – *Wolfgang Metzger* was always dressed in a black suit, a white shirt and a black tie. Nobody ever had seen him in a different attire. If you were to look for him in the future above in heaven – you should look for an angel dressed in a black garment, with white wings and a black gloriole!

Jürgen Steinkopff was a very noble character, extremely well educated, open-minded, and generous. The first time I went to see him in Darmstadt he invited me and my wife for dinner. And he dedicated us the book of *Paul Rom* which he had published. When I am sitting in my library today with this book in my hand I am very grateful about having met this man. At the same time I am very sad because I lost him. I will never forget the funeral of *Jürgen Steinkopff* in Darmstadt in 1979, exactly 40 years ago. His personal assistant tenderly touched the closed coffin *Jürgen Steinkopff* was lying in. By doing so she expressed what all of us felt: deep love and deep sadness.

Hans-Jürgen Walter supported the plan to establish a society which would maintain and develop the theory of Gestalt. He became the first editor of »Gestalt Theory«. *Hans-Jürgen Walter* was very motivated, especially by the idea to apply

the principles of Gestalt theory to the important field of psychotherapy. He received his PhD and *Jürgen Steinkopff* published his thesis within in the serial publication »Red books of Gestalt theory«, which I had started in 1975.

Let me finally talk about the early history of GTA, please! The first members of our society were: *Jürgen Steinkopff*, *Hans-Jürgen Walter*, *Friedrich Hoeth*, *Michael Stadler*, *Manfred Sader*, *Walter Piel* and *Ulrich Groeben*. During the founding assembly these people elected me president. I was very young at that time and was not as gifted as other founders were, particularly *Friedrich Hoeth*. Maybe the founders had the idea »Wem Gott ein Amt gibt, dem gibt er auch den Verstand – To whom God gives an office, he also gives the mind« as the German philosopher *Friedrich Hegel* assumed. Unfortunately in my case this assumption did not prove to be true. Years later the society got a president, much more honourable than I was: *Manfred Sader*. We elected *Friedrich Hoeth* Vice President. *Wolfgang Metzger* supported the newly founded society by becoming Honorary President. In the first years we could win *Walter Asmus*, *Gaetano Kanizsa*, *Edwin Rausch* and *Manès Sperber* from Paris as honorary members.

I had to organize the first GTA-conference at the University of Darmstadt in 1979, exactly 40 years ago. *August Dahl* presented the contribution of *Jürgen Steinkopff* about the meaning of »Gestalt«, which this wonderful person had prepared at the end of his short life. I also organized the second GTA-convention in Bielefeld in 1981. Some weeks after this

convention *Friedrich Hoeth* shot himself to death with one of my guns.

Some years later I put my membership on hold for many years because of a conflict with the administration of this society. But in 2013 *Marianne Soff* invited me to the conference in Karlsruhe. I accepted at once and joined the society again. So president *Hellmuth Metz-Göckel* was able to welcome back the prodigal son of the society.

These years around the foundation of our society had been the most terrible years of my personal life. I lost almost all I had. My father was fallen in the war two month before my birth. By the way: this old briefcase belonged to him. I carry it to the places where he was as soldier of German Wehrmacht: so I show him again these places in Poland and in Russia. By the death of my father the heart of my beloved mother *Gisela Guss* got broken and it never healed. She committed suicide in 1976. She was only 52 years old. My very good friend and vice president *Friedrich Hoeth*, committed suicide, too. He was only 50 years old. My idol, publisher and friend *Jürgen Steinkopff* died in 1979. He was only 51 years old. I lost hope and sank deeper and deeper into alcoholism. In the blessed year of 1992 I could finally escape – not by the help of psychotherapists or even medical doctors, but by the grace of God and his obedient servants in the community of Alcoholics Anonymous.

During the foundation years of our society I was often tempted to commit suicide same as my mother and my

friends had done. Sometimes I already held the Smith & Wesson in my hand. But I postponed every time to pull the trigger. You see: procrastination is sometimes very useful.

Anyway, I am saved now and I am looking forward to the upcoming ten or twelve conferences of our wonderful society, particularly to the very next in Trieste. Thank you so very much indeed, ladies and gentlemen!

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