

## Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb

Since 1979 Spagnuolo Lobb has been contributing to the development of the theory and method of Gestalt therapy in hermeneutic line with the basic text of Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. Developing the thinking of Isadore From, Spagnuolo Lobb presents a model centered on the unitary nature of the phenomenological organism/environment field and on the co-creation of the *contact boundary* in the figure/ground dynamic. The contact boundary is defined as the place in which the self unfolds, that is to say the shared figure of the process of contact that emerges from the ground of possibilities of the phenomenological field. It is the place and time where it is possible to experience both the anxiety that gives rise to the unease and a new perception of the self-in-relation to the other.

Spagnuolo Lobb moves the focus of the traditional therapeutic intervention. Going beyond the more famous technique of Gestalt therapy - the "empty chair" - she places in the experience felt at the contact boundary between therapist and patient the possibility to make phenomenologically evident the anxious-making relational modalities, acquired in previous interactions. Therefore, developing one of Isadore From's suggestions, she changes the technique from "Put your mother on the chair and tell her what you feel" into "Tell me, the therapist what you would tell your mother". There are various consequences of this displacement; for instance, when during a session a patient says to the therapist: "Last night I was upset and couldn't sleep", this communication is to be read and explored, not only as an internal experience, but also as a figure that the patient creates from the ground of the relationship with that specific psychotherapist, and which includes an intentionality of contact towards her/him ("I hope you won't make me leave here upset like last time").

The perspective on the co-creation of the contact boundary enables to leave the intrapsychic point of view in favour of a contextualized concept of change, based on the mutual regulation of the rhythms and perceptions of the therapist/client diad (a dance), as the neurosciences and intersubjective theories make clear. For Spagnuolo Lobb the health towards which the psychotherapist must direct her/his work is the spontaneous vitality, the "missing gesture" visible in the esthetic of the patient's movement, while the neurosis is the desensitization of the contact boundary, the sleeping of the senses that makes people feel bored and boring. Accepting the teachings of Erving and Miriam Polster, Spagnuolo Lobb considers the therapeutic glance to be a sort of spotlight that illuminates the "beauty" of the client, a light that makes visible the harmonic vitality inherent in the wholeness with which each is present in the relationship and adjusts to it in a unique, creative manner. Thus the client will be able to awaken - looking at him/herself and feeling recognized in this light - the sense of her/his beauty and the spontaneity of being there.

Spagnuolo Lobb's diagnostic model provides a map that enables to find one's direction in what happens at the contact boundary, and tools in order to read both the contributions of the past and the "tensions" towards the future, as they present themselves in the here-and-now of the therapeutic setting. The concept of the here-and-now is thus redirected in the concept of *thenow-for-next*.<sup>1</sup> The developmental perspective of a *polyphonic development of domains*<sup>2</sup> (or modalities of contact) enables to access the complexity of the patient's being-there, not comparing it with maturative tasks that belong to the developmental phases, but observing how s/he manages the complexity of situations towards a creative adjustment.

On this epistemological basis, Spagnuolo Lobb has constructed models for specific clinical situations:

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1 Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2013). *The Now-for-Next in Psychotherapy. Gestalt Therapy Recounted in Post-Modern Society*. Istituto di Gestalt HCC Italy publ. Co. [www.gestalt.it/eng](http://www.gestalt.it/eng)

2 Spagnuolo Lobb M (2012). *Toward a Developmental Perspective in Gestalt Therapy Theory and Practice: The Polyphonic Development of Domains*. In: *Gestalt Review*, 16 (3): 222-244.

1) The model of **Gestalt therapy for couples**,<sup>3</sup> based on three experiential dimensions of the couple's functioning. They range from recognising the "differentness" of the other to revealing one's affective vulnerability to the other. She has called this model "to feel at home in a foreign land".

2) The model of **Gestalt therapy for families**,<sup>4</sup> which distinguishes four stages in the session, in which the intentionality for contact of each member is supported in order to replace a painful field with a playful phenomenological field.

3) The model of Gestalt therapy for co-parenting, which considers six relational competences developing in the unfolding of parenthood, each characterized by certain intentionalities for contact. Referring to esthetic Gestalt values, this model aims to support parents to **see the "beauty" in one's offspring**.<sup>5</sup>

4) The model of relational preparation to give birth, for couples, which considers delivery to be a relational process whose competences can be applied both to the relationship of the couple and to the relationship with the offspring. The model – validated by research – distinguishes seven psychological dimensions inherent in pregnancy and delivery, and explores each of them in the learning units of the training for couples. She has called this model "**birth as relational re-birth**"<sup>6</sup>

5) The community model for seriously disturbed clients in **psychiatric structures**,<sup>7</sup> which applies Gestalt therapy to treatment of seriously disturbed clients (in both the private and the institutional setting). It defines relational experiences that enable the client to construct the "ground of taken-for-granted certainties" necessary for the structuring and differentiation of the self.

6) Finally, the **model for groups**,<sup>8</sup> a tool to work on group process, basing on dyachronic (ground) and synchronic (figure) aspects of group's making contact. This model has been applied to training groups<sup>9</sup> as well as to the **organizational consulting**.<sup>10</sup> This last model includes a qualitative research which

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3 Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2007). Being at the contact boundary with the other: The challenge of every couple. In: *British Gestalt Journal*, vol 16, n. 1., pp. 44-52.

Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2013). From the need for aggression to the need for rootedness: a Gestalt postmodern clinical and social perspective on conflict. *British Gestalt Journal*, vol. 22, No. 2, 32-39.

4 Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2013). The Now-for-Next in Family Psychotherapy. In: *The Now-for-Next in Psychotherapy. Gestalt Therapy Recounted in Post-Modern Society*. Istituto di Gestalt HCC Italy publ. Co. [www.gestalt.it/eng](http://www.gestalt.it/eng), pp. 190-228.

5 Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2015). Lasciarsi trasformare dai figli. Proposta di un modello estetico di genitorialità. In: *Idee in Psicoterapia*.

6 Spagnuolo Lobb M. (1992). Childbirth as Re-Birth of the Mother. A Psychological Model of Training for Childbirth by the Gestalt Therapy Approach. In: *The Gestalt Journal*, vol. XV, n° 1, 1992, pp. 7-38

7 Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2003). Creative Adjustment in Madness: A Gestalt Therapy Model for Seriously Disturbed Patients, in: Spagnuolo Lobb M- Amendt-Lyon N (Eds.), *Creative License: The Art of Gestalt Therapy*, Vienna & New York: Springer, pp. 261-277.

Francesetti G., Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2013). Beyond the Pillars of Hercules. A Gestalt Therapy Perspective of Psychotic Experiences. In: Francesetti G., Gecele M., Roubal J. (eds.), *Gestalt Therapy in Clinical Practice. From Psychopathology to the Aesthetics of Contact*, Milano: Franco Angeli, pp. 399-434

<sup>8</sup>Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2013). The Now-for-Next in Group Psychotherapy. The Magic of Being Together. In: *The Now-for-Next in Psychotherapy. Gestalt Therapy Recounted in Post-Modern Society*. Istituto di Gestalt HCC Italy publ. Co. [www.gestalt.it/eng](http://www.gestalt.it/eng), pp. 229-251.

Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2013). From the need for aggression to the need for rootedness: a Gestalt postmodern clinical and social perspective on conflict. *British Gestalt Journal*, vol. 22, No. 2, 32-39.

9 Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2013). Human Rights and Social Responsibility in Gestalt Therapy Training. In: Klaren G., Levi N., Vidaković I. *Yes we care! Social, political and cultural relationships as therapy's ground, a Gestalt perspective*. The Netherlands: European Association for Gestalt Therapy. pp. 71-83.

10 Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2015). Stress and organizational well-being. A Gestalt organizational consulting method supported by grounded theory. In: J. Roubal, P. Brownell, G. Francesetti, J. Melnick, J. Zeleskov-Djoric (eds.), *Towards a Research Tradition in Gestalt Therapy*. Gestalt Research Press.

aims to compare the manager's experience of the working group with the wish of employees to give their best to the work project.