

The Case of Michela: The Clinical Gaze of Three Gestalt Psychotherapists

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Maria Mione, Anna Ravenna e Stefano Rossi

Abstract

The work proposed here wants to highlight the similarities and differences of reading of the therapeutic process as thought by three Gestalt psychotherapy belonging to different schools. To this purpose, Maria Mione (Gestalt Institute HCC Italy), Anna Ravenna (Gestalt Institute Florence – IGF) and Stefano Rossi (Gift Institute of integrated medicine) have been asked to comment, according to their point of view, the synthesis of a same verbatim of a first session of psychotherapy following the track of some guiding questions. With these questions, we tried to bring out the heart of Gestalt psychotherapy with respect to the reading of the relationship therapist-patient, the modalities of making diagnosis and the aspects of the therapeutic process. The result is an interesting comparison, an integrated and not introjective reading. Some concepts proper to Gestalt psychotherapy (contact meant as authentic participation of the therapist, the concept of field, the importance of the therapist's feeling, the way of making diagnosis) are declined by each author in original and different forms, but not for this reason dissonant.

Keywords: Gestalt psychotherapy, verbatim comments, therapist-patient relationship, gestalt diagnosis, therapeutic process.

The Use of Images and Photography in Gestalt Psychotherapy. Neuroesthetics, Mirror Neurons and Body Resonance

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Abstract

The authors of this article highlight how various psychotherapeutic approaches use images and photographs in order to stimulate new processes and meanings in the therapeutic relationship, activating a positive evolution in the patient. Gestalt therapy, due to its phenomenological process-oriented nature that emphasizes relationship and perception, allows a functional and creative use of images and photographs in the therapeutic process. In the first part of the article the authors offer a theoretical excursus on the clinical use of photographs and images that has seen a significant implementation over the years, assuming a significant value with respect to the benefits on mental health, as confirmed in the literature by psychotherapists of different orientations. The central objective of the authors is to create a theoretical background that allows contact between phototherapy (Weiser, 1999) and Gestalt Therapy; starting from the cornerstones of Gestalt epistemology including awareness,

concentration and presence of the senses, the authors discuss how, through photography, the patient can rediscover a different and creative mode of contact, capable of opening a new proprioceptive narrative path. Another objective of the authors is to highlight the correlation between recent neuroscientific research on mirror neurons, the field of investigation of neuroaesthetics, the concept of “Aesthetic Relational Knowledge” (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013) and that of body resonance, offering a scientific framework that reinforces the validity of the use of photography in the transformative therapeutic processes in the Gestalt field. The authors show how the connection between images and body resonance described by Freedberg (2009) can be superimposed on the clinical work carried out with the use of images in a therapeutic setting using photos chosen by the patient and shared with the therapist. Senses, perception, body, subjectivity, art and embodied emotions, central themes of neuroaesthetics, are also fundamental in the epistemology of Gestalt therapy, where on the clinical level, in the here and now of the relationship, the individual recognises himself and moves energy and intentionality towards the other. In the second part of the article, the authors offer an example of clinical application in a Gestalt psychotherapeutic setting of the images and principles of phototherapy.

Keywords: Gestalt psychotherapy, phototherapy, Aesthetic Relational Knowledge, neuroscience, body resonance.

Addictive Experience and Traumatic Experience: Ground Breaking Compared. A Research Contribution

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Abstract

In the light of similar studies on addiction and traumatic events, the authors investigate the correlations between some emotional and relational dimensions of these experiences, outlining, coherently with a Gestalt vision, the addiction as “a persistent traumatic experience”. It is an experimental survey conducted on a sample of patients, drug addicts and victims of trauma from maltreatment or abuse, in treatment. This comparative analysis highlighted the common points between addiction and trauma, taking into consideration the correlated neurobiological and physiological aspects. Specific consideration was given to emotional and physical past, family background, actual relationships and therapeutic relationships, used as observational vertices to understand the similarities between addictive subjects and traumatized subjects. The results support the thesis that addiction and trauma are fixed figures on a hardened background which do not allow the organism to grow and alter its relationship with its surroundings and that the suffering of addicted subjects is highly correlated with early relational deficiencies. This poor contact skills also reflected on the neurobiological level, since the dissociation between the right and left hemispheres and, therefore, between emotional and cognitive functions, which characterizes both experiences, determines the loss of integrative function such that the self becomes incapable of creating a good synchronization with the field. A therapeutic background work can favor the redefinition of the personality-function and the es-function and restore the spontaneous orientation towards the relationship and neurologically the outcome of this therapeutic action becomes

functional reintegration between the two hemispheres. Therefore the support that the Gestalt therapist gives to the addicted and traumatized patient is therefore aimed at the intentionality of contact never fully satisfied in the organism-environment field.

Keywords: Abuse, addiction, figure-ground, trauma, contact intentionality.

The Time of Hope

Elisa Baragetti e Elena Palmero

Abstract

The article proposes a reflection on the existential concept of Hope, considered a precious experience within current relationships, inserted in a socio-cultural field in which the future appears increasingly fragile, precarious and “sick” (Galimberti, 2007). In fact, today we are witnessing a general weakening of relationships, a change in the ways of being-with-each other that we have always used to reach each other (just think of the behavioral innovations introduced following the Covid-19 pandemic) and the shared fears related to the environmental and climatic future of our planet. Initially, the article investigates how the Gestalt therapy can take care of the future temporal dimension through support for the now-for-next, which already includes particular attention to the movement of Hope. Then we will try to explain what it means to feel Hope and feel it with the other. The “time of Hope” in therapy represents a relational space that can only be reached by crossing, with caution and delicacy, the “time of pain” (ours and our patients) and capable of providing new and nourishing meanings to the past, present and future (Borgna, 2005). The time of Hope is also a profoundly human and very precious experience for the therapist, continuously in contact with pain and despair: “training” this “attitude to life” supports him or her in being a supporter of others’ pain, often (and rightly) perceived as too heavy, unfair and inhumane to bear. Finally, a reflection will be proposed on how the Gestalt therapist can now support this experience in therapy, through phenomenological tools and refining innate empathic skills (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2017). In particular, the article focuses on the importance of respecting the “right time”, necessary in therapy to provide the patient and therapist with the opportunity to feel pain together without running away from it: an essential ingredient to achieve a reworking of all “times of life”, through the magnifying glass of Hope.

Keywords: Hope, time, contact-border contact, therapeutic relationship, psychotherapy.

The Couple as a Living Organism: An Experience of Contact

Anna Silvia Persico e Andrea Fianco

Abstract

Individuals and couples are facing a profound metamorphosis: the strength of ancient tradition and codified social norms, so deeply rooted in our inner lives, and the simple happening of new emerging forms of bonding are crashing into each other, shattering the way of being together we've known since the dawn of time. In this article, the authors present theoretical as well as clinical observations on couples, and a gestalt psychotherapeutic model of work on the *couple as a living organism*. The authors focus on the deep social, psychological and affective transformation couples are dealing with, trying to redefine themselves as *individuals* as well as a part of a *us*, looking for new forms of relationships in a persistent experimentation between the strong needs of belonging and differentiation. The authors analyze the importance of the biological, familial, cultural and social ground on which the couple stands as a frame to better understand how a couple can develop, grow and organize its form and meaning through the flow of time. Functioning of the couple organism is then considered under the light of its id, ego and personality functions, and of the contact-interruption and withdrawal mechanisms. The authors suggest a model of gestalt clinical intervention on couples, aiming at and supporting the search for intimacy among the individuals in the room, as part of a broader process of openness, change, and authentic creative expression: the authors' intentionality is to encourage forms of contact, in the real trust of the beauty of the *us*, and in the real trust of a couple organism able to self-regulate, change and grow through time in deep knowledge of each other, respect and appreciation for the vital growth of the I-Thou relationship.

Keywords: Gestalt Couple Therapy, social ground, couple organism, intimacy, I-Thou relationship.

Inheritors of Lake Cowichan: A History of the Birth of Gestalt Therapy Research in Canada. Excerpts from an Interview with Les Greenberg

Jay Tropianskaia e Sabrina Deutsch Salamon

Abstract

There is little documentation about the origin of Gestalt therapy in Canada and the birth of Gestalt therapy research. This article provides insight about the establishment of The Gestalt Institute of Toronto (GIT), which originated out of the Gestalt community in Lake Cowichan. It provides excerpts from a conversation with Dr. Leslie Greenberg, a member of the first graduating class of the GIT who is considered the father of research for Gestalt therapists. These excerpts shed light on the birth of Gestalt research through Dr. Greenberg's journey from his

early experiences with Gestalt therapy training, through his initiative to conduct research in Gestalt therapy, to his evolving relationship with Gestalt therapy over the years.

Keywords: Gestalt therapy, Gestalt therapy research, psychotherapy history.