

***The Sense of Death in Children. Gestalt Psychotherapy
and Pediatric Hematology-oncology.
Dialogue Between Momcilo Jankovic and Margherita
Spagnuolo Lobb***

Mariangela Patti

Abstract

The article reports on the transcript of a dialogue between Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb and Momcilo Jankovic on the theme of "Mourning in Children". In the first part of the comparison, Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb emphasizes how the intentionality of contact is the basis of every relationship for Gestalt psychotherapy that uses a phenomenological and aesthetic perspective to sustain what is vital and needs to be recognized in order to effectively work with the child.

Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb goes on to describe briefly the theory of "the dance steps" to represent the way in which the mother-child/therapist-patient intentionality is realized.

The metaphor of the dance is used to represent the sensations and movements that are activated between the child and his caregiver. This theory includes the concept of interpersonal synchrony, that, as neuroscience demonstrates, is the basis of emotional security, self-regulation and alliance.

Momcilo Jankovic's reflections underline the need to integrate increasingly the medical and psychological worlds. Retracing his forty years of experience in the world of childhood cancer, he defines sick children as "great teachers of life" because they are always committed to living the present, regardless of whether it may be their last days of life.

He describes his approach to sick children by emphasizing the importance of "being there" for each other in a sincere and serene way, with the ability to build a dialogue based on respect for the child and his time for assimilation of the disease. For Momcilo, the main therapeutic goal is to promote the quality of life in all sick children, even those destined to die.

This comparison of the participants shows how important it is for children to be able to express and share the pain for the loss of a loved one, but also to be able to remember the beautiful things done together. It is also highlighted how the commitment of the "healer" can also be expressed with actions, that is, with doing things with and for the sick child.

For Momcilo "doing something together" (sometimes even daring) promotes the alliance with the sick child and, at the same time, helps parents in the process of mourning as it remains the memory of the joy shared with the child. Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb also stresses the importance of introducing action within the therapeutic setting because it supports the vitality and restructuring of the perceptive and relational gestalt.

Keywords: Oncological diseases, mourning processing, children, Aesthetic Relational Knowledge, intentionality of contact.

Being Siblings Today: Inhabiting Peer Relationships in Postmodernity. Reflections on the Social Background and Therapeutic Implications

Alessia Repossi e Elisabetta Conte

Abstract

This paper stems from an interest in the clinical and community dimensions of human experience and consider the psychopathology in the reverberations of social living.

The experience of the peer relationship and the horizontal dimension are considered the key to understanding the fraternal paradigm and an opportunity to overcome the narcissistic paradigm. The fraternal relationship is considered not only as a specific experience of family life, but as a call to the community and social life in a time that needs new tools for being together. The authors describe the social context in which the theme of fraternity is placed, focusing on the fragility of today's vertical dimension and the need to find new ways of inhabiting the horizontal dimension, which is so widespread today. They propose three main forms of fraternal relationship: between blood relatives, between acquaintances and between those who are unknown. The authors emphasize how the connection between these 3 different forms is the basis that anchors the harmonious fraternal experience.

With this background, a reading of the topic from the perspective of Gestalt psychotherapy is proposed, introducing the concept of intentionality of fraternal contact and that of the horizontal dimension in the clinic. The aim is to develop, both in the therapist and in the patient, a fraternal experience as an anchor in the face of the new demands of today. This experience is a being-with-other that becomes a fertile root to go beyond narcissistic drifts to build belonging and community. For the authors some basic concepts of the gestalt clinical model, illustrated with clinical examples, are new forms of "horizontal" work in the here and now (Wollants, 2021), Aesthetic Relational Knowledge (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2017), Dance Steps (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2019). These concepts are consistent with a therapeutic vision based on the awareness of equal value with the patient, reciprocity, solidarity, belonging to the same human community.

Keywords: Fraternal paradigm, vertical and horizontal dimension, intentionality of fraternal contact, the fraternal relationship in the clinic.

The id in Gestalt Therapy

Mercurio Albino Macaluso

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how the id represents an important theoretical foundation of current relationship-oriented Gestalt therapy. In the founding text of Gestalt therapy, Perls, Hefferline and Goodman redefine the psychoanalytic concept of id from a phenomenological point of view, considering it both as the initial phase of the contact process and as a particular mode of the process itself. Intended in the latter sense, for the authors of *Gestalt Therapy*, the id is the non-integrated mode of the self, the non-rational yet sensed way of being that manifests itself in relaxation when the rational control of the ego is not present.

In individual-centered clinical work, the id functioning of self is the basis of the *continuum* of awareness, which is the classic Gestalt technique that represents the alternative to the free associations of psychoanalysis. From a relationship-oriented perspective, the id functioning allows the therapist to know what is happening in the field through the current of sensations and impressions co-created at the contact boundary. Thanks to his own aesthetic sensitivity, the therapist captures those aspects of the situation that are not normally perceived because they can be grasped through the senses rather than through the intellect. Finally, the id promotes deep communication between patient and therapist that is an important therapeutic factor. When patient and therapist accept the risk of coming out of the safety of their own ego and abandon themselves to the non-integrated functioning of the self, an intimate sharing takes place between them, which is very similar to a form of meditation for two. In this way, the id implies an opening to the spiritual dimension and provides a new horizon to clinical work.

Keywords: id, relaxation, non-integration, flow of awareness, intimate sharing.

Enchantment: The Secret Ally of Psychotherapy

Erving Polster

Abstract

In this piece, I name seven foundational Gestalt therapy concepts. Through a combination of current thoughts and previous writings, I try to show how these basics have evolved in my therapeutic work, teachings, and writings.

Keywords: Animate, witness, mystical, story, laughter, concentration.

Bodily and Emotional Activation in Pain: Bridging Neurosciences and Gestalt Therapy to Understand the Therapist's Wish for Help

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Abstract

Bodily and emotional activation in front of pain have been connected with the wish to help the other. Building on previous research of neuro-aesthetics, and on the concept of Aesthetic Relational Knowledge inside the frame of Gestalt therapy, this research investigated on 29 individuals reactions to of images of pain and neutral feelings in artistic representations and in photos of actors. The individuals were tested with SCL-90-R, MAIA and IRI. The results confirm the hypothesis that the wish to help relates to bodily-emotional activation, with the capacity to feel one's own body and yet hold the emotion of the other.

Bodily-emotional activation was only shown in artistic representation of pain. A possible explanation is that the "movement" that activates a person in front of the pain is better expressed in artistic images. At the same time, the wish to help relates to the capacity to decentralize from oneself and focus on the other. Lack of empathy is not connected with avoidance to help the other. Lack of empathy and wish to avoid helping has shown to relate to a feeling of anxiety and mistrust in coping, rather than with lack of empathy. Looking at Gestalt epistemology – based on phenomenology, aesthetics and the experiential field (Perls *et al.*, 1951; Spagnuolo Lobb, 2019), we can conclude that this investigation has confirmed the hypothesis that the desire to help the other is connected with an embodied dimension that expresses the ability to activate oneself, to feel one's own body and to allow oneself to be crossed by the emotion of the other, containing it, as underlined by the concept of empathy in "Aesthetic Relational Knowledge" (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2018). When empathy, understood here as feeling the other's pain (emotional-body activation), is felt most strongly in the body and there is an ability to decentralize from concern for oneself, then the person experiences a tension toward the other, manifesting a desire for help.

Keywords: Neuro-Aesthetics, Gestalt Therapy, Phenomenological Field, Aesthetic Relational Knowledge, Intentional Resonance.