

## REVIEW

*The Now for Next in Psychotherapy: Gestalt Therapy Recounted in Post-Modern Society* by Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb, Milan: FancoAngeli, Gestalt Therapy Book Series, 2013.

Spagnuolo Lobb's *The Now for Next in Psychotherapy: Gestalt Therapy Recounted in Post-Modern Society* is an evocative and satisfying read. It includes a preface by Paolo Migone, codirector of the Italian journal *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, who refers to Spagnuolo Lobb as one of the "mothers" of Gestalt therapy in Italy. There are ten chapters in 286 pages. Although Spagnuolo Lobb's narrative has flowing characteristics (also found in the aesthetics of many experienced and skilled therapeutic endeavors, including psychotherapy itself), the chapters organize the book's content in a manner conducive to the reader's conceptual processing. The "Now for Next" in the title conveys the book's consistent attention to carrying the client forward and to being attuned to the client's intentionality. Attention to the now (where the past resides) with reference to the future, rather than focusing unduly on the past, is in keeping with current clinical practice modalities other than Gestalt, and it may be that Gestalt therapy has played a role in shifting current modalities in this manner. To me, one of the most interesting aspects of this book is its linkage of Gestalt therapy to society, and the title is well chosen to indicate this linkage. Although her book focuses on Gestalt therapy, Spagnuolo Lobb helpfully indicates her impression that there are not some therapeutic modalities that are better than others; there are "garments" and "languages" with which aspiring psychotherapists identify at the moment of choice in which to be trained. She states that every approach has its own theoretical and methodological consistency—but not a *supremacy*. Her acceptance of therapeutic approaches that are other than Gestalt supports the reader's unique and personal comprehension of all that unfolds throughout the book. There is no need to gird oneself against "dogma" or "rightness."

Material layout in this book is supremely logical and enhances the reading process. Gestalt principles are explained, many in context with other principles and grounding. Spagnuolo Lobb makes the history of psychotherapy come alive as she compares and distinguishes schools of thought and their stances with regard to social issues of the times. In this way, the reader is given a better appreciation of the creativity and aesthetics of Gestalt therapy along with rationales and appreciation for other ways in which clinical professionals have carefully and deliberately constructed theory, models, and therapy. I believe the inclusion of time frames with their associated emerging attempts

at amelioration of human misery adds breadth as well as depth to this book—attributes that are often lacking in publications about psychotherapy, underlying philosophies, and time-line “fitness.”

The generous inclusion of therapy session dialogues adds practicality and demonstrates the importance of attunement, “being-with,” witnessing, and skill in hearing, seeing, and recognizing clients as whom they really are. Having a place where one is able to be safely oneself may be the greatest draw and benefit of psychotherapy. I have recently found these dialogues to be easy and efficient venues for sharpening a variety of skills and approaches in supervision. I am grateful for these dialogues not only because they make my job as a supervisor easier but also because reading them aloud is personally impactful. As a general statement: I am impressed with this book’s practical usefulness and its sweeping coverage of historical, developmental, and philosophical aspects of Gestalt therapy as well as other modalities extant.

Classical theory of Gestalt therapy is handled efficiently, including the self as process, cycle of experience, goals of psychotherapy (from egotism to relational creativity), and recent Gestalt developments such as the “between” and the dimension of time in contact processes. Somatic experience is emphasized throughout, and it is in relation to embodied experience that Spagnuolo Lobb introduces her map of “polyphonic development of domains.” Her article regarding domains development appeared in 2012 in *Gestalt Review* (16.3, 222-244). Clinical examples are helpfully included to illustrate Spagnuolo Lobb’s developmental map. She follows with the recounting of oneself in psychotherapy, attending to narrative from the perspective of its cocreation in introjective style of contact as well as projective, retroflective, and confluent contact styles. For several reasons, narrative disruption has long been one of my interests, and Spagnuolo Lobb’s perspective on self-narrative has broadened my understanding both of the importance of narrative and of the necessity of somehow developing a coherent story of one’s life—a life that makes sense.

Her chapter on aggression and conflict in postmodern society, from the need for aggression to the need for rootedness (a now-for-next example), highlights the nature of postmodern society and how much we have lost. She illustrates aggression within introjective, projective, retroflective, and confluent patterns of contact. Following the aggression chapter, she discusses love in the context of psychotherapy, including examples of the triadic perspective in a dyadic therapy setting. This section is constructively thought-provoking. She follows with sections on the use of Gestalt therapy with couples, families, groups, and training.

In order to do my job thoroughly as reviewer of *Now for Next*. . . I am including three trivial annoyances as well as a medium-sized one. Trivial

annoyances are: (1) There is an initial confusion about authorship, as the cover indicates coauthors; however, the reader quickly realizes that Spagnuolo Lobb's voice is present throughout, from beginning to end. The cover page for the text includes her name only. (2) There is lack of clarity, primarily in Chapter 5, regarding "aggression" and "aggressiveness." This may be a problem only for me and not for other readers; for me, it would have been helpful to make a distinction between "aggression" as an action and "aggressiveness" as a human characteristic. (3) Book pages are printed with "justified margins," i.e., margins are of equal width. Some words at the ends of lines are cut at the margin and then are completed at the beginning of the next line. There appears to be no explanation for printing pages in this way except for sustaining the equal width of margins. The reader too often has to go back to the end of the preceding line in order to determine what the entire word is, and thus the meaning of the sentence. I feel confident that Spagnuolo Lobb carefully reviewed the galleys and that she did not know the page printing would be done in this manner.

A little bit more than trivial annoyance for me is the lack of an index. I admit this lack is a pet peeve for me that persists and resonates when professional publications do not include an index. The Table of Contents is beautifully done; for many readers it will probably suffice and compensate for the absence of an index, and the book is well-referenced. I do not know how publications are done in Italy. In the United States (and usually in England), publishers give authors a choice of whether or not to include an index. If an index is to be included, authors are usually required to compile it themselves or hire it done at their expense. While some authors may be unwilling or unable to take on the task of an index, the cost of hiring it done is usually negligible. It is possible that Spagnuolo Lobb was not given any options with regard to indexing her fine book.

I am glad to know that *Now for Next*. . . is available to me and that it is an available resource for clinical professionals. I can recommend its inclusion in the libraries of all psychotherapists and professionals who work toward bettering the human condition and the culture in which we find ourselves.

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