

## Gestalt Therapy in Chile

Adriana Schnake & Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb

### Summary

In this dialogue Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb and Adriana Schnake retrace the foundation of Chilean Gestalt Psychotherapy going back in time to the years of Salvador Allende's Presidency and the *golpe* of Augusto Pinochet in 1973. In those years Adriana Schnake was professor of psychiatry and, under the influence of professor Ignacio Matte Blanco, revolutioned psychiatry training in University, focusing not only on psychopathology but encouraging the adoption of a phenomenological perspective by medical students. Adriana Schnake with Francisco Huneeus began to translate and study the books of Fritz Perls; together with Claudio Naranjo, who met Fritz Perls personally when he was in Esalen, they introduced Gestalt psychotherapy in Chile and promoted their clinical approach all over Sud America and the rest of the world. Adriana Schnake underlines the fidelity of her phenomenological clinical model to the original way of Fritz Perls of practicing Gestalt psychotherapy, disregarding the over-intellectualization of the Gestalt psychotherapy model adopted in the New York Institute by the followers of Laura Perls. Adriana Schnake describes in detail the long collaboration with Claudio Naranjo and explains how one of the most relevant reasons for disagreement among the founders of Chilean Gestalt Psychotherapy was the different degree of interest in the controversial practice of using hallucinogenic substances during psychotherapy sessions. Claudio Naranjo has dedicated his whole life to the study of the effects of LSD and other hallucinogenic substances in the treatment of psychiatric disorders. Adriana Schnake, after a period of intense experimentation with drugs, gave up the use of substances during sessions of psychotherapy, due to a serious accident that occurred to a patient, and developed a phenomenological model of therapy centered on the mind-body integration. Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb specifies the importance of a theoretical and practical model that goes beyond the dichotomy mind-body and underlines the existence of a link between certain perceptual styles and psychopathology. Adriana Schnake e Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb examine and compare perceptual styles and symptoms in neurosis and psychosis and reaffirm the importance of adopting a phenomenological perspective and learning humility and honesty with patients, especially for therapists in training.

*Key words:* Gestalt therapy, mind-Body, Fritz Perls, polarity, dialogues of the body, Naranjo.

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## Neurosciences of Addiction and Gestalt Clinical Practice: Functional Integrations

Giancarlo Pintus & Marialuisa Grech

### Summary

The authors describe the relationship between recent neuroscientific researches on addiction (cfr. Robinson e Berridge, 1993; Leshner, 1997; Volkow e Fowler, 2000; Goldstein, 2001; Goldstein e Volkow 2002; Gessa, 2003; McFarland *et al.*, 2003; Pulvirenti, 2007; Bricolo *et al.*, 2010) and clinical insights of Gestalt therapy on this topic; in particular they refer to isomorphism of some brain areas (subcortical and superior) involved both in the addiction pathogenesis and in the development of relational skills. The authors describe Perls' reflections (1995) on "hanging on bite", the recent reflections of other Gestalt authors (Pintus e Crolle Santi, 2014; Pintus, 2015; 2016; 2017) on the dependent relationship style, the value of the first parent-child relationships as an opportunity for relational and cerebral attunement and describe the processes and areas of the brains involved in these phenomena. The addiction development is an experience of persistent background trauma, a dissociation between cognitive and emotional brain areas. If the child feels supported in the first significant relationships to live a spontaneous contact boundary then a good attunement and recognition are created. On the contrary the relational detuning causes less development of the mesolimbic area and deficit in the decoding of emotions. These children could develop a specific vulnerability to become fragile and insecure adults. The authors emphasize the adolescent condition: he is pushed more and more towards efficiency but often he feels enormous anxiety. The desensitization, caused by substances, is often an opportunity for the adolescent who, confused between who he was and who he would like to be, finds a label for his pain.

The Gestalt therapist does not work against the addiction powerful figure, he works with the background experience of the client: in pathological dependences the obsession for the loved object becomes so intense, so capable of nullifying the background experience, that in therapy it is necessary to work creatively to revitalize it. Therefore the main therapy goal is not abstinence but to revitalize the self, provide basic and genuine recognition. The living and real presence of a significant Other on the contact boundary can become an opportunity for the addict to reconstruct his dysfunctional attachment tale; unlike an object, immovable and immutable, the living presence of the therapist can become an opportunity to realize the intentionality of interrupted contact. Concepts such as contact boundary, situational field, aesthetic relational knowledge (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2015) represent a possible bridge towards neuroscience, particularly for understanding the mind, the brain and the relational styles of an addictive client. The dance between therapist and client (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2017), attention to the person as a whole, the aesthetic and phenomenological gaze of the therapist (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2012; 2015) are effective tools for a Gestalt therapeutic work. These tools modify, in an existential way, the background of the experience of the addicted person in the relationship with himself and the world; but they are able, in a neurophysiological sense, also to activate a new integration between cognitive and emotional areas of the brain that had been disconnected from the trauma of addiction.

*Key words:* Addiction, neuroscience, adolescence, vulnerability, recognition experience.

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## Silence Between Suspended Words. Selective Mutism in the Gestalt Perspective

Michele Lipani

### Summary

This article proposes a reflection on the selective mutism and traces a possible path of psychotherapeutic intervention, consistent with the principles of Gestalt psychotherapy. The work takes its cue from the experience of the muteness of a five-year-old child and his relational, family and school context.

After a brief diagnostic profile and the description of some typical communicative-relational modalities, a few hints on the thoughts elaborated by the main psychotherapeutic approaches follow, and on the multiple variables (biological, psychological and relational) that seem to be involved in a multifactorial etiological model.

Then some theoretical-methodological frames are suggested, aimed to guide the therapeutic project:

- Selective mutism is understood as part of a phenomenological-relational “field”;
- The symptoms are seen in the holistic dimension of the bodily experience and in their regulatory and adaptive function;
- Finally, reference is made to the *contact process* to underline the ways in which the mutism is expressed in the reciprocity of an interaction; we highlight the dysfunctional aspects and especially the resources in the experience of the child and the caregiver.

The trace for the psychotherapeutic project is divided into three parts:

- The intervention with family members, with a starting point for a phenomenological observation of the reciprocity between child and parent (we refer to the model of “*dance steps*”, developed by the Institute of Gestalt HCC Italy) and a nod to some themes present in the family with selective mutism;
- The second area of the intervention proposes some indications on the therapeutic relationship with the child, suggesting a particular attention to the intersubjective dimension (which enhances the therapist’s resonance skills through an aesthetic relational knowledge) and to the child’s ability to attune and synchronize;
- Finally, some topics that can accompany the experience of the child with selective mutism at school are presented, and some guide lines for a collaboration between psychotherapist and teachers are suggested.

*Keywords:* Selective mutism, freezing, aesthetic relational knowledge, phenomenological observation of the relationship.

Reference for this article: Lipani M. (2019). Silenzi tra parole sospese. Il mutismo selettivo nella prospettiva gestaltica. *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXII, 2: 51-77, DOI:10.3280/GEST2019-002004

## Parental Tuning, Recognition of Affective States and Vulnerability to Addiction: Some Research Data

Giancarlo Pintus & Giulia Nora Pappalardo

### Summary

The article proposes a research contribution on the relationship between parental attunement in the first 16 years of life, affective co-regulation and vulnerability to addictions. According to the Authors, addiction can be understood as a creative adaptation to a belonging intention never fully realized, the effort to overcome the relational void left by experiences of lack of attunement that have caused relational recognition to fail. If the background of the parent-child experience is too full of anxiety, or if some suffering interferes with proper attunement, the child is likely to develop a specific vulnerability that compromises good identification with the emotions and intention of the field. Thus, it is highly probable that, in front of excitements that are not supported and contained in the holding relationship, the child could implement processes of bodily and emotional desensitization, which is the precondition for the development of alexithymia: a creative adaptation to the perceived chaos. The aim of this study is to evaluate the correlation between compelling experience and the quality of primary relationships and whether, and how, “traumatic” relational experiences work as a factor of vulnerability to the development of an addiction. Starting from a reading of pathological dependencies as a creative adaptation in a relational field marked by primary relational detuning, and in the light of the aesthetic perspective of a disharmonic “polyphonic domain development” (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2012; 2015), the study compares two samples of 26 subjects included: a clinical group of drug-dependent patients in treatment and a control group. All groups of subjects underwent the parental bonding tool (Parker *et al.*, 1978) and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (Bressi *et al.*, 1996). From the results, it emerges in the clinical group prevails a style of parenting called “control without affection”, (low levels of caregiving and high levels of hyperactivity) both in the relationship with the mother and with the father; in the clinical group there are also significantly higher levels of alexithymia than in the control group. Thanks to the correlational analysis of the data, it is evident that the lack of good parent-child attunement in primary relationships is considered a factor of vulnerability to the development of alexithymia and can lead to a greater predisposition to engage in addictive behaviour. The authors therefore believe that early relational failures in parental care can lead to an emotional-relational and neurobiological background positive to a specific vulnerability in regards to addictive experiences. In this sense, the addiction takes the form of a creative adaptation in an insecure relational field, as the outcome of an inadequate asymmetrical relationship, as well as a dramatic attempt to realize an unacknowledged and non supported intentional contact in the caregiving relationship, which is always an intentionality of belonging. The article was produced without any funding.

*Keywords:* Addiction, parenting, alexithymia, relational tuning, relational intentionality.

Reference for this article: Pintus G., Pappalardo G.N. (2019). Sintonizzazione genitoriale, riconoscimento degli stati affettivi e vulnerabilità alle addiction: alcuni dati di ricerca. *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXII, 2: 79-97, DOI:10.3280/GEST2019-002005

## Love That Hurts: A Gestalt Therapy Approach to Love Addiction

Matteo Limiti

### Summary

Starting from the best-seller of the American psychotherapist Robin Norwood, the article – in its first part – tries to find a definition of the concept of *love addiction*, a well spread suffering, known to psychotherapists but still absent from the main international diagnostic manuals. Borrowing the conceptualization of Reynaud *et al.* (2010), the present paper identifies the phenomenological-clinical and neurobiological similarities between love addiction and drug addiction, and distinguishes between a narrow view and a broad view regarding the treatment of these forms of suffering. In the second part, given the current lack of Gestalt therapy literature, the author tries to apply a Gestalt model for addictions (Pintus e Crolle Santi, 2014) to the construct of love addiction. This attempt refers to several key concepts of Gestalt therapy and takes into account their specific declination by the Institute of Gestalt HCC Italy: creative adjustment, polyphonic development of the domains, aesthetic diagnosis, figure-ground organisation, theory of the self. It is agreed that, as with any other addiction, the intentionality of contact moves towards the attainment of an experience of recognition. This is even more true for love addicts, for whom we can hypothesize that their need for a totalizing and saving bond is an attempt to compensate for unsatisfactory childhood experiences characterized by the presence of a caregiver not in tune with their emotional needs.

Afterwards, the paper outlines, according to a comparative perspective with the gestalt therapy theory of addiction, the crucial aspects of clinical Gestalt work with love addiction: a non-abstinent approach, the acceptance of the intentionality of contact, the restoring of the figure-ground's organisation, the resensitisation of the contact boundary and the reowning of spontaneity in contacting the environment, the construction of new and more functional creative adaptations. What has been stressed here is the importance of an aesthetic approach that captures the vitality of the co-created figure between patient and therapist. Finally, the author brings some examples drawn from his clinical experience: Gestalt-oriented psychotherapy with men and women affected by love addiction and his experience as moderator of a virtual community of self-help for people who suffer of this pathology.

*Key words:* Addictions, love addiction, creative adjustment, figure-ground organisation, self, polyphonic development of domains, aesthetic diagnosis, intentionality of contact, spontaneity.

Reference for this article: Limiti M. (2019). L'amore che fa male: una lettura gestaltica della dipendenza affettiva. *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXII, 2: 99-114, DOI:10.3280/GEST2019-002006