

## **“Timeless teenagers”: Relational Rootedness and Development of the Self**

Massimo Ammaniti & Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb

### **Abstract**

In this dialogue Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb and Massimo Ammaniti outline the features of adolescence in postmodernity. Starting from the contents of the conference “*Gli adolescenti senza tempo*” (Adolescents with no time), Siracusa, June 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the authors discuss about reliability of the term “adolescence”, as it was originally intended, to describe current condition of teenagers. The authors explore parent-teenager relationship from different perspectives. Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb, according to Gestalt psychotherapy perspective, focuses on parental physiological support of children throughout such a difficult age as adolescence. For teenagers this phase of life is characterized by concerns about self integration. Detachment attempts from family ties, in search of independence and freedom, are also frequent and produce high levels of conflict. Parents are required to be resilient and to resist frequent conflicts with teenagers. Parental care and support are fundamental for teenagers during adolescence.

Massimo Ammaniti, according to psychoanalytical perspective, focuses on the lack of identity in adolescence. Frequent conflicts between parents and teenagers conceal search of autonomy. The development of awareness of feelings of hate towards parents lead teenagers from childhood to adulthood. Parents role is fundamental to ensure teenagers a good and healthy growth.

The authors discuss the importance of peer relationships in adolescence and evaluate social impact of phenomena as bullying and group violence. The impact of virtuality in parent-teenager relationship is also highlighted.

Spagnuolo Lobb and Ammaniti conclude with some considerations and practical indications to improve teenagers condition in postmodernity. A watchful and discrete approach in observation of teenager activities in internet and social media is essential for parents. More political and social investments must be dedicated to teenagers. Creation of new real meeting places is hoped to combat teenager loneliness and over-investment in virtuality.

*Key words:* Gestalt psychotherapy, Self, Adolescence, Parenthood, Postmodernity.

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## From Losses of Ego Functions to the Dance Steps Between Psychotherapist and Client. Phenomenology and Aesthetics of Contact in the Psychotherapeutic Field

Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb

### Abstract

This paper tries to describe the actual contact-making between client and therapist as a co-created “dance”. It basically makes a proposal to get rid of the individualistic language that is still in Gestalt therapy’s categories called “losses of ego functions”, by using the idea of dance, which includes the feelings and the movements of both therapist and client. The author underlines the need to develop the concepts of the original formulation by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951; 1994, pp. 235 ff.) into categories which consider the mutual interactions between two people. This perspective is in line with contemporary studies of neurosciences (just as an example: Damasio, 1999; Siegel, 1999; Gallese *et al.*, 2007), intersubjective and relational psychoanalysis (Mitchell, 2000; Stern *et al.*, 2003). Describing her concept of *Aesthetic Relational Knowledge* (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2018), the author shows how the therapist feels part of the experiential field co-created with the client. The therapist uses her own attunement and resonance with a field-oriented, phenomenological and aesthetic glance. This perspective allows the therapist to stay with the spontaneity of the co-creation of the therapeutic contact (the “dance steps”), including at the same time developmental and psychopathological aspects of the experience of the client (the *polyphonic development of domains*). These make the client’s experience of the ground, as a “music of steps” that the client plays in the therapeutic session.

The author describes the “dance steps” as procedural spontaneous actions of contact-making between therapist and client: they represent a phenomenological way to observe a dyadic situation and can also be used for research. She also presents a grid that summarises the excitement experienced at the boundary, vital competences and risks of each “dance step”. This tool can be used by therapists, to orient their work, and for training, supervision and research purposes.

Considering different kinds of “music” in the experience of the ground, this work is based on the humanistic idea that any suffering is also a competence for contact and that change comes from staying with it, instead of from external interventions. This paper is also based on the aesthetic idea that there is a harmony in the way we perceive the world, however we perceive it – whether with anxiety and pain or with full senses and joy. Rather than paying attention to what does not work, the author underlines the importance of recognizing this beauty in clients, using the therapist’s own presence as a field-oriented tool.

*Key words:* Dance steps, aesthetic relational knowledge, field, losses of ego functions, polyphonic development of domains.

Reference for this article: Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2020). Dalla perdita delle funzioni-io ai “passi di danza” tra psicoterapeuta e paziente. Fenomenologia ed estetica del contatto nel campo psicoterapeutico. *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXIII, 1: 21-40, DOI:10.3280/GEST2020-001003

## Phenomenology and Aesthetic Recognition of the Dance Between Psychotherapist and Client: A Clinical Example

Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb

### Abstract

This article follows a first presentation of the “dance steps” between therapist and client, which appeared in the Spring 2017 issue of the British Gestalt Journal (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2017). It gives a clinical example of how this phenomenological and aesthetic observational tool works in practice.

The author describes briefly the “dance steps” (described more extensively in the previous paper) and also outlines a possible research path to validate these as a Gestalt therapy observational tool. The aims of the tool will be developed in two directions: (1) A clinical use of the steps for supervision: the supervisor can use the dance steps to supervise the therapeutic situation; (2) Use of the steps for research: a detailed description in behavioral terms of the steps will be provided to describe what happens between two or more people in a therapist/client situation.

Finally, the author presents a clinical case to implement the concept of “dance steps”: a phenomenological description of a session reported by the client and by the therapist through a reflection on mutual interactions.

The context of the work is a Summer Program that takes place every year at the end of July in Syracuse, Italy: a five-day retreat for psychotherapists from all over the world, with the main aim of taking care of themselves whilst also receiving theoretical and clinical updates. One of the participants describes what she remembered of the session and then the therapist adds her experience. The recollection is live and most of all it recounts the perception of the client and that of the therapist, in “dance steps” terms. It is Gestalt therapy work on a dream, which they have called “the wolf work”. The author concludes connecting the use of reciprocity to political and social response-ability today. A main clinical problem today derives from the lack of recognition from the other, which makes bodily desensitization evident in our clients. This brings Gestalt therapists to focus on the reciprocity of their interactions with clients, instead of on how only the client makes contact. As a matter of fact, in the actual dance between them there is the possibility of revitalizing the contact boundary, where the self is co-created.

*Keywords:* therapist/client dance steps, phenomenology, aesthetics, desensitisation, reciprocity.

Reference for this article: Spagnuolo Lobb M. (2020). Fenomenologia e riconoscimento estetico della “danza” tra psicoterapeuta e paziente: un esempio clinico. *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXIII, 1: 41-56, DOI:10.3280/GEST2020-001004

## The Concept of “Field” in Gestalt Therapy: Developments and Implications

Mercurio Albino Macaluso

### Abstract

In psychology, “field” is a controversial concept, since it is used with different meanings depending on the different theoretical perspectives. Even in Gestalt literature the concept of field does not yet have a clear and unequivocal definition. The author tries to systematize it, describing the different readings of it and its evolution in the Gestalt literature. He, then, analyses some aspects and implications, starting with three epistemological currents that have marked the development of science: holism, ecology and quantum mechanics. In this way, he highlights the richness and topicality of the Gestalt field concept and contextualizes it from a historical and cultural point of view. The Gestalt theory of the field belongs to a holistic vision of human nature and reality, according to which mind, body and external world are not realities with independent existence, but complementary and inseparable aspects of the contact process. The author shows how the Gestalt holistic perspective is very similar to the view of quantum mechanics, which considers subject and object as inseparable aspects of a single process. The author then analyses the ecological dimension of Gestalt Therapy, referring in particular to the meaning that Gregory Bateson attributes to the term “ecology”. In this way, points of contact and differences between the Gestalt and the ecological vision of Bateson are highlighted. Finally, the author points out that the advent of quantum mechanics has challenged traditional scientific thinking, based on the principles of classical physics. The discoveries of quantum physics show the limits of a purely objective conception of the universe, undermining our own idea of matter. Perhaps, in the future, it will be quantum mechanics that will provide us with a better understanding of field psychological processes.

*Keywords:* Field, holism, ecology, self-regulation, quantum mechanics.

Reference for this article: Macaluso M.A. (2020). Il concetto di “campo” in psicoterapia della Gestalt. Sviluppi e implicazioni. *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXIII, 1: 57-73, DOI:10.3280/GEST2020-001005

## The Phenomenological Attitude in a Field Perspective. A Point of View on Contemporary Gestalt Psychotherapy

Vincent Béjà

### Abstract

In this paper the author tries to give a sense of how and why the phenomenological attitude, when applied in a field perspective, is useful and operates in and on the therapeutic dyad, thus having an impact on the client's lived world. In the thoughts of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty the phenomenological attitude consists mainly in a disposition to listen. This thought, applied to the field of psychotherapy, is summed up in opening oneself to the experience of the other, to feed a disposition to amazement and listening. In their theory, Perls and Goodman described the *self* as having at least three modes of functioning, *ego-function*, *id-function* and *personality-function*. In the phenomenological attitude of the therapist, the *id-function* is more activated, while the others have less space, but have not disappeared; it remains in the therapist's consciousness, in a sort of trace of the ego-function, an ability to "realize that something is being observed". In the listening, the therapist somehow splits into a "listener" and a "reflective person", alternating in a fluid way without forgetting the possibility of the other. In the field – in which therapist and patient are no longer two distinct individuals who communicate with each other, but exist in front of each other on the basis of a background that can be defined common by the fact of being in the presence of each other – the therapist, adopting an attitude of openness, empathy and curiosity facing the patient's experience, helps to modify the "intersubjective matrix", the fabric of mutual influence from which the two experiences constantly emerge. With all the senses open, from this disposition to listening to bodily resonances, the poignancy of the therapist's "ego" dissolves, lightens its imprint on the patient's immediate experience and thus implicitly encourages the patient to unfold, creating a profound and lasting change, as research has shown.

*Key words:* Phenomenology, field, listening, responsiveness, relationship.

Reference for this article: Béjà V. (2020). L'atteggiamento fenomenologico in una prospettiva di campo. Un punto di vista sulla psicoterapia della Gestalt contemporanea *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXIII, 1: 75-83, DOI:10.3280/GEST2020-001006

## **The Mediation Process from the Gestalt Perspective. The Case of Elena and Giovanni**

Manuela Partinico & Paola Canna

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to illustrate a clinical case of family mediation from the perspective of some basic concepts of Gestalt therapy. Drawing on their direct clinical experience as well as on some theoretical contributions, the authors propose a brief reflection on the experience of a couple (Elena and Giovanni) with a preschool daughter, who is experiencing the separative path. The method used is the phenomenological one.

The theoretical references supporting this work are: figure/background formation, the Gestalt therapy theory of self; the Aesthetic Relational Knowledge; the intentionality of contact underlying the capacity of mediators to identify with the couple's experience and couple's conflict and the appearance of the Parental Personality Function. With regard to aesthetic relational knowledge, it is understood as the awareness of co-mediators that emerges from the shared phenomenological field. It is formed by empathy and by the ability to resonate, that is the reaction of mediators to the experiential context. Empathy and Resonance are the two important tools which enable to understand Elena and Giovanni's relational suffering. A main part of the work in the mediation process consists in giving support to the Parental Personality Function with the aim of replacing the reference framework "being husband/wife of" with that of "being father/mother of". To achieve this goal, it is essential to free up the space occupied by the couple conflict in order to increase the issues related to parenting. According to the Gestalt perspective, Aesthetic Relational Knowledge is the premise from which to promote the couple's "now-for-next".

It is represented by the all-embracing experience of parenting, capable of restoring everyone's sense of self that emerges from relational recognition.

*Key words:* Gestalt family mediation, couple conflict, separation, parental personality function, relational recognition.

Reference for this article: Partinico M., Canna P. (2020). Il processo mediativo secondo la prospettiva gestaltica. Il caso di Elena e Giovanni. *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXIII, 1: 85-97, DOI:10.3280/GEST2020-001007

## The UK Gestalt Psychotherapy CORE Research Project: The Findings

Christine Stevens, Jane Stringfellow, Katy Wakelin & Judith Waring

### Abstract

This article will describe a research project of results with the gestalt approach did in the United Kingdom by the English gestalt community using CORE-OM. It is an example of how we can do research rigorously and with a voluntary contribution. The Clinicians are now more aware that doing research in psychotherapy is important in order not to be self-referential and to demonstrate scientifically whether psychotherapy works and how. The CORE-OM System (clinical outcome routine evaluation – outcome measurement) is based on a research paradigm of Practice-Based Evidence. It is validated, is the most widely used, internationally and nationally, by therapy approaches and within psychotherapy services. Since it is atheoretical, easy to use and collects quantitative data, it encourages clinicians to do research. We publish this article to introduce psychotherapy research to Italian Gestalt therapists and to encourage them to do research. Furthermore, we publish it because, starting from this research, the Gestalt Community decided to repeat the outcome research with CORE-OM in Italy (La Rosa *et al.*, 2019). This paper will describe the ground in the UK, briefly the tool, the research project, the data description and the results. Also, it has discussion about limits and resources of this research. The Gestalt sample in this study was compared with the effectiveness of some studies with cognitive-behavioural, person-centered and psychodynamic therapies with CORE-OM. The article also shows the additional standard measures used in the CORE-OM literature to assess the efficacy of therapy, reliable and clinically significant improvement over other studies. The results show that Gestalt psychotherapists are as effective as therapists trained in other approaches working in national health services and primary care.

*Key words:* Research in Gestalt Therapy, outcome research, CORE-OM, research in psychotherapy, treatment effectiveness.

Reference for this article: Stevens C., Stringfellow J., Wakelin K., Waring J. (2020). Il progetto di ricerca CORE sulla psicoterapia della Gestalt in UK: i risultati. *Quaderni di Gestalt*, XXXIII, 1: 103-115, DOI:10.3280/GEST2020-001009