

# 03 Psychopathology

ISSN 2039-5337

Gestalt Therapy Kairos Institute

december 2012/03

JOURNAL OF  
**PSYCHOTHERAPY**



HUMAN  
COMMUNICATION  
CENTER





## **Gestalt Therapy** hcc **Kairòs** Institute Post graduate school in Gestalt Psychotherapy

In its quarter of a century, the institute significantly contributed to the history and progression of Gestalt psychotherapy, forming about a thousand psychotherapists and intersecting various and fruitful relationships of cooperation and affiliation with many national as well as international corporations and bodies directed to scientific exchange and the research in the specific field of psychotherapy and treatment connections. From the beginnings, the institute has been in contact with Gestalt psychotherapy founders that were living at that time – Isadore From, Jim Simkin – and handled to start didactic and scientific exchanges with the most illustrious representatives of second generation Gestalt therapists – E. Polster, M. Polster, S.M. Nevis, Ed Nevis, R. Kitzler and others – committing themselves to international research projects about Gestalt psychotherapy theory and therapy. The institute weaved didactic and scientific exchanges with the most prestigious Gestalt therapy institutes in Italy and abroad, as well as with the most qualified Gestalt Therapy associations worldwide, maintaining relationships of cooperation.

In 2001, the institute started a collaboration with the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, establishing second level Master courses, arrived at its 16th edition.

### **THE INSTITUTE ORGANISES**

- Second level Master degrees in "Paths of prevention and treatment of sexuality: Gestalt Therapy and interpersonal relations" in cooperation with the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery in Rome.
- Second level Master degrees in "Family Mediation" in cooperation with the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Faculty of Psychology in Milan
- CME Continuing Medical Education courses

### **AFFILIATIONS**

**EAGT** (European Association for Gestalt Therapy)  
**NYIGT** (New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy)  
**SIPG** (Italian Association for Gestalt Therapy)  
**FISIG** (Italian Federation of Gestalt Schools and Institutes) **CNSP** (National Coordination for Psychotherapy Schools) **FIAP** (Italian Federation of the Association of Psychotherapists).

### **WEB**

[www.gestalttherapy.it](http://www.gestalttherapy.it)

### **BLOG**

[www.gestaltgtk.blogspot.it](http://www.gestaltgtk.blogspot.it)

### **FORUM**

[www.abusosessuale.forumattivo.it](http://www.abusosessuale.forumattivo.it)  
[www.gestalttherapykairos.forumfree.it](http://www.gestalttherapykairos.forumfree.it)

### **OFFICES RECOGNISED BY THE MIUR**

Sicily **Ragusa** / Latium **Rome** / Veneto **Venice**  
D.M. 9.5.94, D.M. 7.12.01 e D.M. 24.10.08

### **SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE**

**Giovanni Salonia** Scientific responsible  
**Valeria Conte** Responsible of didactic  
**Erminio Gius** Member of scientific committee

**FOUR-MONTHLY JOURNAL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY ON LINE**  
**GESTALT THERAPY KAIRÒS journal of psychotherapy**

**Scientific Director**

Giovanni Salonia

**Managing Director**

Orazio Mezzio

**Chief editor**

Gaetano La Speme

Rosaria Lisi

**Law Office**

Silvia Distefano

**Scientific Committee**

Angela Ales Bello

Viittoria Ardino

Paola Argentino

Eugenio Borgna

Bruno Callieri † February 12, 2012

Vincenzo Cappelletti

Piero Cavaleri

Valeria Conte

Ken Evans

Sean Gaffney

Erminio Gius

Bin Kimura

Marilena Menditto † February 2, 2013

Aluette Merenda

Rosa Grazia Romano

Antonio Sichera

Christine Stevens

**Editing**

Laura Leggio

Aluette Merenda

Agata Pisana

**Translations and English Consultancies**

Glenda Lowe

Gemma McGlue

Luisa Pacifico

**Graphic project**

Marco Lentini

**Pagination**

Paolo Pluchino

**Reproducing artworks**

Marika Vicari

**Gallerist**

Antonio Dipasquale

**Printed by**

Grafica Saturnia

GESTALT THERAPY KAIRÒS International journal of psychotherapy

Address for all correspondence:

GESTALT THERAPY KAIRÒS

journal of psychotherapy

Via Virgilio, n°10

97100 Ragusa Sicilia Italia

Enquiries:

Editorial +39 0932 682109

Subscriptions +39 0932 682109

FAX +39 0932 682227

Email: [redazione.gtk@gestaltherapy.it](mailto:redazione.gtk@gestaltherapy.it)

Website: [www.gestaltherapy.it](http://www.gestaltherapy.it)















## INDEX

- **Editorial**..... pag. 9
- **In this issue**..... pag. 13
- **Research**..... pag. 17
  - The personality-function in Gestalt Therapy**  
*Antonio Sichera*
  - Theory of self and the liquid society**  
**Rewriting the Personality-function in Gestalt Therapy**  
*Giovanni Salonia*
- **Art and psychotherapy**..... pag. 61
  - Borderline**  
**Border-line**  
*Annalisa Iaculo*
  - Re-reading 'the re-discovered body'**  
**interview with Maurizio Stupiggia**  
*ed. by Elisa Amenta*
- **Society and psychotherapy**..... pag. 73
  - The flight of Bauman in Siracusa**  
**interview with Zygmunt Bauman**  
*ed. by Orazio Mezzio*
- **Readings**..... pag. 85  
*A. Merenda*



The question of identity is at the heart of this third number of GTK. All of the contributions in these pages refer continually back to one of the unresolved questions of our time – the great theme of the ‘who’. It is as if today we radically experience a different existential priority compared to the past. Ultimately, almost two thousand years of western civilisation have revolved around questions of the ‘what’ and the ‘why’, around the essence and the meaning of reality. Progressively (and laboriously), the most mature modernity has begun to move the focus of interest towards context and process, towards the ‘how’ things happen, towards the ‘when’ and ‘where’ and towards ‘how’ relationships between beings occur. Nowadays, without wishing to doubt the fundamental importance of attention focused on meaning, capable of appreciating processes and of understanding contexts, we are aware of an even more basic lack which sheds a new light on everything. There are essentially two factors which have modified the field: we live in a world in which, on one hand, the definition of subjectivity – faced with the speed and quantity of information, with the frenetic multiplication of contacts and tasks, as well as the crisis in institutions which are points of reference – has become more and more difficult and liable to fragmentation; we find ourselves immersed, on the other hand, in an ever more impersonal global political and economical sphere which lacks faces and responsible agents in the gestures and actions which characterise social living. GTK has merely put this condition under the spotlight in the hope of making it emerge, analysing it and wrestling with its tangles and perspectives. As far the crisis of the ‘who’ occurs on an individual and relational level is concerned, the two articles by Giovanni Salonia and Antonio Sichera on the personality function of the self in Gestalt Therapy attempt to provide some answers: are subjective integrity and a unified sense of self possible in a time of fragmentation? How can we know ‘who’ we are in conditions and roles which are continually being modified and changed? Other articles address, with diverse accents and deeply felt and profound rationality, the unease of identity and the definition of a universe



with ever more uncertain limits, the latter frequently characterised by a dull but acute ache (whether individual or collective). Maurizio Stupiggia's interview on the violated body and Vinanda Var's study of the victims of the brutal violence of the *khmer* in Cambodia make compelling reading: how can one recover a sense of identity and dignity where the self has been amputated and mutilated by a hostile and destructive environment? In the shocking novelty of a faceless and soulless power in which the 'who' turns out to be unidentifiable and thus impossible to grasp, the interview conducted by Orazio Mezzio with one of contemporary society's most acute analysts of unease, Zygmunt Bauman, whom we are honoured to have with us, is the gift that GTK makes to its readers. The arts are also well represented in this issue. Marika Vicari's pictures which illustrate the journal and Annalisa Iaculo's poems which visit it with discretion close the Gestalt and give images and words to one of our yearnings: to learn the novelty of being ourselves, in an original manner, beside and with other people, to build today's living body and tomorrow's world.

*Ragusa, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012*







## IN THIS ISSUE

### Antonio Sichera

**pag. 17**

Antonio Sichera teaches modern and contemporary Italian Literature in Faculty of Literature at the University of Catania and is the teacher of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics of the post-graduate school of specialisation in Gestalt Psychotherapy of the Institute of Gestalt Therapy HCC Kairòs. Having studied lexicography and semantics in his formative years under Giuseppe Savoca's prestigious school in Catania, he has written essays on Foscolo, Pasolini, Pavese, Pirandello, Montale, Quasimodo and numerous other contemporary authors from an interdisciplinary and hermeneutic perspective. He has dedicated his time to critical theory and literary movements, in relation to philosophy and theology, between Gadamer, Benjamin and Jossua. On the clinical side, he is the author of diverse essays concerning the aesthetic and hermeneutic aspects of Gestalt Therapy. He has translated texts from both Greek (*A Diogneto*) and from French (different works by Father Jossua).

### Giovanni Salonia

**pag. 29**

Psychologist, psychotherapist, lecturer in Social Psychology at the LUMSA University of Palermo and at the Antonianum Pontifical University in Rome. Scientific director of the school of specialisation in Gestalt Psychotherapy of the Institute of Gestalt Therapy HCC Kairòs (Venice, Rome, Ragusa) and of the second level Master's Degrees offered in collaboration with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Rome. Internationally known as a teacher, he has been invited to numerous universities within Italy and abroad, he has published numerous papers in national and foreign journals as well as *Comunicazione Interpersonale* (with H. Franta), *Kairòs*, *Odòs*, *Sulla felicità e dintorni*, which deal with both anthropological and clinical themes. He is director of *GTK*, online journal of psychotherapy and is a former president of the FISIG (Italian Federation of Gestalt Schools).

### Elisa Amenta

**pag. 65**

Psychologist, psychotherapist, teacher and clinical supervisor of the school of specialisation in Gestalt Psychotherapy of the Institute of Gestalt Therapy HCC Kairòs. She specialised in

Gestalt psychotherapy at the Institute of Gestalt HCC where she participated in various seminars conducted by eminent figures in Gestalt Therapy and Body Therapy. For several years she has carried out research on sexual abuse and memory of abuse within the GTK scientific community. She is currently responsible for the Institute's Forum on abuse.

### **Maurizio Stupiggia**

**pag. 65**

Psychotherapist, he lectures in special pedagogy at the University of Genoa. He is assistant lecturer in psychology at the Westdeutsche Akademie in Dusseldorf. He is director of the school of specialisation of Biosystemic Psychotherapy in Bologna. He works in the clinical and educational spheres in various European countries, in Japan and Latin America. Together with Jerome Liss he published *La terapia biosistemica* (Franco Angeli, 1994).

### **Orazio Mezzio**

**pag. 73**

A graduate in political science. He won an international prize for journalists *Più a Sud di Tunisi, Portopalo 2010*, for his service about North Korea entitled *Sorrisi di Regime*. He has written historical and socially-engaged essays and, in collaboration with G. Matarazzo he wrote *Politica, le idee contano ancora?* (Rubbettino, 2008). He was mayor of Sortino from 1995 to 2007, and amongst other things he created the Day Centre for Minors and organised meetings between international representatives of different religions, publishing the acts under the title: *Il Libro, la parola, il dialogo* (IMU - Istituto Mediterraneo di Studi Universitari, 2007).

### **Zygmunt Bauman**

**pag. 73**

Sociologist and philosopher, emeritus professor of sociology at Leeds and Warsaw Universities, one of the most authoritative and prestigious interpreters of post-modern society. He has earned international renown thanks to his studies concerning the connection between the culture of modernity and totalitarianism, in particular Nazism and the Holocaust. In his works he treats a series of pertinent themes concerning identity and the fluidity of relationships. His analysis of modernity and of globalisation decisively impact contemporary culture and have

been received as an necessary reference point for any reflection on the present or future of the human condition. His bibliography is vast and well-known and has been translated into many languages, including non- Western ones.

### **Aluette Merenda**

**pag. 85**

Psychologist and Gestalt Psychotherapist. Senior Researcher in Dynamic Psychology at the Department of Psychology, University of Palermo (Italy).

Invited Teacher at the Gestalt Therapy Kairos Institute in Ragusa (Italy) and at the Gestalt Italy HCC Institute (Human Communication Centre) in Palermo (Italy) and at others psychotherapy institutes.

Her major topics of research focus on: abused family relationships and young offenders; Clinic Zoo-anthropology and co-therapy models; co-therapy in new family typologies.

### **Marika Vicari**

Artist. After graduating *cum lode* in painting from the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Venice, she graduated from the Faculty of Design and arts from IUAV in Venice. She lives and works in Creazzo, Vicenza. She has participated in numerous collective and personal exhibitions in Europe, the USA, Mexico, Brazil and Canada. She is curator and critic of independent art. For many years she has worked with the International Festival of Contemporary Visual Arts, Art Stays, Ptuy and, since 2010, she has also been the director of the Summer Academy Ptuy, Slovenia.





## THE PERSONALITY-FUNCTION IN GESTALT THERAPY

Antonio Sichera

From the very origins of psychoanalysis, the question of personality – its status, possibilities and limits – has been an unsolved problem.

### 1. Psychoanalysis and personality

From the very origins of psychoanalysis, the question of personality – its status, possibilities and limits – has been an unsolved problem. In the Freudian model, in fact, the fundamental balance of subjectivity is so weighted in favour of the unconscious that the minimal territory left to the conscious is subject to an inevitable diffidence which enormously limits its importance.

Consequently, the overall quality of the personality in Freud's work appears to be the result of psychological impulses and thrusts which the organism is unable to dominate in its day-to-day awareness: one acts, thinks and feels on the basis of submerged factors which are powerful enough to shed but poor light on any aware definition of the ego. An ego which is called on to recover, thanks to therapeutic work, at least partially the psychological territory which is normally lost, in favour (above all) of the Id.

At first sight, Jung's approach does not appear to differ greatly. From the point of view of Freud's greatest 'heretical' pupil, the starting-point still remains the comparison of the personality with a «mask», if one takes this to be the original meaning of the ancient *persona* of the Romans, that is, the dress with which we cover ourselves every day, concealing our real self behind a role or definition. The scope of a possible recovery of the value and consistency of consciousness, rated much more highly by analytical psychology than it was by its elder Freudian sister, does not remove the similarities in initial input with that of the Viennese master: as far as we know, day by day we think and do things for ourselves, but if this is left to the naivety of the subject then it turns out to be inevitably eroded by a sense of incompleteness; it can be compared to a leaky waterproof covering and as a serious obstacle in our journey towards truth.

In this context, the position expressed by Gestalt Therapy through its foundational text cannot but appear as fundamentally contradictory. In Goodman's writing, in fact, the psychoanalytical yeast is not killed off but is fostered through widespread moods of anarchy, amongst other things. Nevertheless,

the position expressed by Gestalt Therapy through its foundational text cannot but appear as fundamentally contradictory.

from a different angle, in all of *Gestalt Therapy*, alternative forms of fermentation are in evidence which project a different – and sometimes unexpectedly alternative – light upon the personality and its domain. It could not have been otherwise, however, in a work which never settles into a definitive position but which is ready to call everything into question (including itself) when confronting the mobility and totality of existence. We will now attempt to understand something of this.

## **2. The personality as a secondary construct: society and language in Gestalt Therapy**

If one reads the pages of *Gestalt Therapy* superficially, then one risks being blinded by the undeniable refutation of any primacy in the position of the personality. It is depicted, most commonly, as a social construct overlying the original *poiesis* of the organism, drenched obviously in environmental elements but differently from the way in which the personality is formed. Concretely, the argument has two main threads: first society and then language: «Primitively, the ties of sex, nourishment, and imitation are social but pre-personal: that is, they likely do not require a sense of the partners as objects or persons, but merely as what is contracted. But at the stage of tool-making, language, and other acts of abstraction, the social functions constitute society in our special human sense: a bond among persons. The persons are formed by the social contacts they have, and they identify themselves with the social unity as a whole for their further activity. [...] 'persons' are reflections of an interpersonal whole, and 'personality' is best taken as a formation of the self by a shared social attitude».<sup>1</sup>

The reasoning running through Goodman's argument is crystal clear. In following books like *Communitas*, the material author of *Gestalt Therapy* was reflecting undoubtedly a commonly

In Goodman's writing, in fact, the psychoanalytical yeast is not killed off. Nevertheless, from a different angle, in all of Gestalt Therapy, alternative forms of fermentation are in evidence which project a different – and sometimes unexpectedly alternative – light upon the personality and its domain.

1 F. Perls, R. Hefferline, P. Goodman (1994)(or. ed, 1951), *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality. With a New Introduction By Isadore From and Michael Vincent Miller*, The Gestalt Journal Press, Highland, NY, 92-93.

In Goodman's vision, the organism's primary functions are intimately social but still do not presuppose the appearance of the traditional idea of society.

The adult male in sophisticated society, then, in the face of a chronic social threat as far as his integral functioning is concerned, falls back on mechanisms of obliteration, hallucination, isolation and regression and creates an original form of psychological problem

held standpoint of the foundational group when he intends to separate the organism-in-contact-with-the-environment within a unified field from what in common language is called a 'person'. In Goodman's vision, the organism's primary functions are intimately social but still do not presuppose the appearance of the traditional idea of society. We are born, that is, we are immersed in an O/E field and consequently we find ourselves exposed to the nourishing experience of contact, but we experience all of this as socially influenced organisms (if we imitate others, feed ourselves and we live out our sexuality) and not as 'people' who enter into interpersonal relationships within a shared symbolic and cultural context. When, in fact, one emerges from the state of the primary organic condition and the social unity and the abstract culture with which human beings identify themselves come to light, as far as *Gestalt Therapy* is concerned, there is a grave danger of substituting (and not integrating) the basic organic level with the social and interpersonal one. In contrast, ultimately, with Heidegger's reconstruction of *Dasein*, typical of the influential *Sein und Zeit*, Goodman denies that instruments and symbols (that is, the techniques of material and cultural constructs, of exchange and governance, as well as of science) are the primary constituents of the world. This substitution constitutes – according to a hermeneutical line within *Gestalt Therapy* – an important but dangerous form of progress that threatens the organism's equilibrium: the latter sees itself as bereft of any form of animal satisfaction and of personal satisfaction, in the widest sense, and finds itself obliged to invent that «[...] very recent acquisition of mankind» that is «the neurotically split personality as a means of achieving equilibrium»<sup>2</sup>.

The adult male in sophisticated society, then, in the face of a chronic social threat as far as his integral functioning is concerned, falls back on mechanisms of obliteration, hallucination, isolation and regression and creates an original form of psychological problem, engendered by the impossibility, in a context characterised by extreme abstraction, and strong juridical and cultural prescriptions, to serenely give

2 Ivi, 95.



expression to his individual social 'animal'. Ultimately, *«personality is a structure created out of such early interpersonal relationships; and in its formation there has usually already been the incorporation of an enormous amount of alien, unassimilated or even unassimilable material (and this, of course, makes the later conflicts between individual and society so much the more insoluble)»*<sup>3</sup>.

Here, we find ourselves facing the first reason for diffidence towards the 'secondary' status of the personality, which a little further ahead becomes 'doubled' in the book, in a certain area of discourse on language and its impact on human life. The personality is, in fact, also definable as «a structure of habits and words» and must therefore be placed in close relationship with the acquisition of language, which is the most potent system of symbols available to human beings. There is personality – in Goodman's opinion – when there is a «sub-vocal discourse» (and thus, thought), when «convictions» are consolidated as habits of syntax and of style, when «evaluations» are produced and are considered as a whole composed of rhetorical stances. The 'verbal', ultimately, gives a 'personal' form to the organism (in that it is a preverbal entity), supplying it with interiorised discursive thought, allowing it to form convictions and to formulate evaluations taking as its starting-point a determined linguistic configuration of the self. Even in this case, *Gestalt Therapy* energetically moots the question of the integration of the pre-verbal and the verbal, affirming that in a physiological process which is not externally conditioned, there would be a spontaneous bi-directional flow, so it would be normal to have a return to the pre-verbal from the verbal, as well as a forward movement of the pre-verbal in the realm of language.

That is to say, by leaving the human organic dynamism alone, there would be a normal integration of linguistic and conceptual abstractions with the primitive dimension of murmuring, shouting, of non – modulated articulation of the voice-from onomatopoeia to musical games – which accompany the fundamental experience of feeding, of imitating and of sexuality. In a society like the modern one, however, over-crowded with

There is personality – in Goodman's opinion – when there is a «sub-vocal discourse» (and thus, thought).

3 Ivi, 99-100.

In a society like the modern one, however, overcrowded with linguistic constructs and a high rate of abstraction and symbolism which normally occupy a pre-eminent position, the free movement between pre-verbal and verbal is practically impossible, so much so as to produce the neurotic, split personalities that Goodman calls' «verbalising personalities».

linguistic constructs and a high rate of abstraction and symbolism which normally occupy a pre-eminent position, the free movement between preverbal and verbal is practically impossible, so much so as to produce the neurotic, split personalities that Goodman calls' «verbalising personalities».

This expression refers in the book to a quality that characterises the men and women of our time who are separated from their roots and divorced from the intimate awareness of their own bodies: it is entirely verbal, empty, shallow and lacking in true contact with ones' self. Language, for these individuals, is merely an artifice with which to uselessly cover their distance from the generative *humus* and the consequent deficit of a full and nourishing contact with the environment. However, as we have realised, the question does not end here.

### **3. Some contradictions. From the basic conflict to the spectacular quality of language**

On the basis of the considerations that have just been made, those who think that they can easily classify Gestalt Therapy among psycho-analytical approaches, on principal convinced of a fundamental incompatibility between the individual and society and equally doubtful about the cost/benefit ratio of language, since it is both a capability but also a hindrance to pre-linguistic man's authentic sensory and motor nature, would undoubtedly need to take a change of direction. A few sentences are enough to say why. In the first place, I would refer to the final line of the long reconstruction we have just made that led us to consider society, in its widest sense, as a factor which deforms the original social instinct and thus of the origin of a conflict that engenders unease:

*«On the other hand, it is also likely (even if the different likelihoods are contradictory) that these 'irreconcilable' conflicts have always been, not only at present, the human condition; and that the attendant suffering and motion toward an unknown solution are the grounds of human excitement»<sup>4</sup>.*

4 Ivi, 96.

This passage is brief but extremely important. It brilliantly presents us with the (profoundly hermeneutic) hypothesis that the relationship between individual/society should not be read in the usual Freudian terms of «civilization and its discontents». Coherently with the fundamentals of his critical re-reading of Freud, and therefore of the vision of the world as an element of the field and thus of open possibilities, of reconstruction and of creative reworking, *Gestalt Therapy* postulates the fertile doubt of whether the conflicting dynamic between social norms and individual urges actually belongs to the fundamental experience of human beings and, far from being an unavoidable curse, whether it actually represents a decisive source of excitement and so of energy from the point of view of contact and of growth. We do not suffer from an irresolvable conflict, but we measure ourselves with the world, with its opportunities and its asperities, taking from the meeting and from aggression the vital lymph which turns us into subjects and makes us grasp the *Lebenswelt* in which we are planted.

The same type of healthy reversal is found in the pages of *Gestalt Therapy* that deal with language. If, on one hand, the emergence of language can bring with it the risk of an undesirable burial of primary (and pre-verbal) urges of the organism, on the other, language is portrayed in the book as a source of immense potential in the moment in which it is well assimilated in the contact process. «*In speech of good contact, these levels cohere in the present actuality*»<sup>5</sup>.

It is a union between speech, as thought in its sub-vocal and pre-personal social communication aspects: it is a form of integration which reaches its apex in poetry, true therapy of verbalisation and so an authentic pathway for the therapeutic rebirth of the self.

This is because denying language is not the way to get out of the cage, as many therapeutic models based on the body think, on the contrary, we should seek in poetry the skeleton key that will open the defences of the separation between verbal and pre-verbal and will restore beauty and light to

*Gestalt Therapy postulates the fertile doubt of whether the conflicting dynamic between social norms and individual urges actually belongs to the fundamental experience of human beings.*

5 Ivi, 101.

In a world which is not «[...] a lost paradise» it makes no sense to insist on the purely theoretical and ideal dimension of the human which comes before language, but we should blaze the trail of an effective gestaltic reconnection of the levels of existence.

Placing the personality at the beginning of the book is a way to assign a primary role in the field to this highly controversial function

contact (and thus to life): «[...] the contrary of neurotic verbalizing and creative speech; it is neither scientific semantics nor silence; it is poetry»<sup>6</sup>.

In a world which is not «[...] a lost paradise»<sup>7</sup> it makes no sense to insist on the purely theoretical and ideal dimension of the human which comes before language, but we should blaze the trail of an effective gestaltic reconnection of the levels of existence. It is there that language, declined in its purest form, assumes an irremovable paradigmatic value.

In this context of personality one can then still speak of another light.

#### **4. A different verbum relationis: the personality-function of the self**

What does an alternative vision of the relationship between the individual and society and of language involve? What occurs in *Gestalt Therapy* is ultimately the construction of a paradigm which is no longer in harmony with psychoanalytical prejudices. The proof and, above all, the consequences for today of this new direction are manifold. Let us list them.

The first element to consider is certainly the book's subtitle: *Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. Perhaps little attention has been paid to the fact that in the reading pathway laid out in the first words of *Gestalt Therapy* (the subtitle, that is) two aspects are being focussed on: on one hand, excitement as the propulsive energy of experience and, on the other, growth as the outcome, whilst the human personality is situated as the balancing-place between the essential poles of contact, its alpha and omega: excitement that moves the organism or blocks it in angst, the growth that emerges from good contact and rendered useless by the experiences which are lacking in the physiological dynamism of the self. And it does not end there. Placing the personality at the beginning of the book is a way to assign a primary role in the field to this highly controversial function, when we realistically consider

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, 105.



the subjects of the experience as an indivisible mixture of body and language, of sense and movement, of multiple languages. It is almost that ultimately, if we look closely, a lot rests upon precisely that apparently secondary level but which coincides with the hips where contact experiences converge after an important number of them have been received. This brings us to the second element.

Going back to language, in this more complex and less ideologically rigid vision, it comes as no surprise that *Gestalt Therapy* considers the personality – in its intimate connection with language – as an exceptional conquest: «A child forming his personality by learning to speak is making a spectacular achievement [...]»<sup>8</sup>.

This means that the boost that the human organism receives at the moment in which it begins the developmental process of learning language is to be considered exceptional as well as being tightly correlated to the formation of the personality: it is the 'linguistic' personality, self aware and capable of expressing itself and thus of communicating with itself and others. It is the great leap forward that makes us what we are and which allows us to project ourselves out into the world. That this dimension of linguistic self-awareness is absolutely central is demonstrated by the analysis of the triple movement contained in speech acts, where there is always an «it», the message, an «I», the style and tone of the speaker, and a «you», the rhetorical attitude, the desire, directed towards the other, which is expressed in the words that are said (and, as we have by now realised, rhetorical attitudes or habits is the same thing as saying «personality»).

Now, it is precisely the level of the «you» that comes to the fore in poetry, when the poet does not physically have an interlocutor in front of him but when he creates his own ideal audience he speaks to himself using the informal 'thou' form and he succeeds in reworking through this «thou», that is, in the play of the personality-function, the many «thous» that his personal history has accumulated, assimilated or – above all – that have left an open wound in his body

it is the 'linguistic' personality, self aware and capable of expressing itself and thus of communicating with itself and others. It is the great leap forward that makes us what we are and which allows us to project ourselves out into the world.

8 Ivi, 100.

which blocks the flow of contact. Without this ability of linguistic reworking of the self which is typical of the personality-function, there would be no poetry and consequently there would no longer be the possibility of an integration between the organism and the environment sufficient for a world which is not a paradise, a world in which it is necessary (and also beautiful) to speak. However, Goodman's astute considerations concerning «spontaneity», seen as a key factor in the process of good contact, need to be placed and context and limited. Certainly, in a simple spontaneous act, the three functions are merely the stages of creative adaptation: the Id as bodily background, the ego as the process of identification/alienation, the personality as the created figure, which the self becomes and assimilates in the organism, joining it to the results of previous growth<sup>9</sup>. However, in common daily experience, a dose of intentionality is normally required; this dose of intentionality and deliberate choice are normally much greater than an ideal one (that is why the ego predominates), that is to say, we have a happily disintegrating form of relaxation (and here we see the centrality of the Id's role), or, to take a different angle, a synthetic component of autonomy and responsibility, which belongs to the personality as a system of interpersonal attitudes. When «[...] *for it is one's own situation that one engages in according to one's role*»<sup>10</sup> then the personality as «[...] *responsible structure of the self*»<sup>11</sup> comes into play, because it renders the process both adequate and appropriate. However, Goodman does not succeed in hiding – if one thinks about the society and culture in which *Gestalt Therapy* was written – his predilection and marked preference for spontaneity and the natural middle mode of contact experience. Despite this, the considerations he makes concerning language and the personality remain as indicators of a method and probably as a provocation which remain exceptionally pertinent for us today.

9 Cfr. Ivi, 156-157.

10 Ivi, 161.

11 Ibidem.

In fact, even if one merely appreciates the bodily aspect which is bound to the personality, the creative and linguistic expression of the substances assimilated in good contact – and therefore the background of contacting, in a diverse but not inferior manner in relation to the Id – that is enough to find oneself face-to-face with the emergency of unease that we have today. This emergency concerns experience which lacks the 'rules of engagement' written in the body, which lacks vital reference points to the context and to the 'other', without a personality that constitutes the linguistic opening-out of the self and thus the guide of creative excitement.

Today what is in doubt is not the question of the intensity of emotions (on the contrary, they are pathologically sought) but the integration of the various aspects of the subject: the possibility, that is, to be free to express oneself whilst one defines oneself, whilst one occupies a place in the world and is able to present oneself as a solid and integrated identity. Is it perhaps that the most significant gestaltic question with regards to the unease of post-modern society is no longer «what do you feel?» but also (and perhaps above all) of «who are you?» given that the present is never separated from the flux of time?

Is it perhaps that the most significant gestaltic question with regards to the unease of post-modern society is no longer «what do you feel?» but also (and perhaps above all) of «who are you?» given that the present is never separated from the flux of time?

## Abstract

The status of the personality-function of the self is subject to a series of thrusts and counter thrusts in *Gestalt Therapy*. Even though it is to be found in the middle of the work and its title (*Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*), Perls and Goodman seem to consider the personality as a secondary function, bound up with a less vivid and spontaneous mode of human experience. At any rate, its space in the developmental framework comes 'after' autonomy and 'after' language acquisition, in a less relevant zone of the self. However, if one digs more deeply into the prose of the basic text one finds that there is another facet to the issue. In truth, in the experience of interpersonal contact, the personality-function takes on a central role and guides the search for the correct positioning of the subject in the world in relation to what is 'other'.





## THEORY OF SELF AND THE LIQUID SOCIETY

### Rewriting the Personality-function in Gestalt Therapy

Giovanni Salonia

*The passage from aware contact  
to unaware assimilation has a deep pathos*  
Fritz Perls – Paul Goodman

*Any development of Gestalt Theory  
must follow on from that theory [Goodman's][...].  
The resurrection of Gestalt Therapy [...]  
not from what is dead, but from what has been left out*  
Isador From

*In future above all we will be dealing with 'managing' emotions  
rather than bringing them to light*  
Mark Solms

### 1. Questions that challenge theory of self

1.1 In August 2011, B.J. Casey, W. Mischel and their team published the results of one of the longest and most famous research projects in behavioural psychology which began in 1972 at Stanford with the 'marshmallow experiment'<sup>1</sup>. Four-year olds were offered a marshmallow and told that if they managed to wait a quarter of an hour without eating it then they would be given another. Obviously, some of the 600 participants succeeded whilst others did not<sup>2</sup>. After fourteen years, the research participants were called back: the children who had resisted temptation had achieved bet-

1 B.J. Casey et al. (2011), *Behavioral and neural correlates of delay gratification 40 years later*, Pnas, August 29th 2011, in «Il sole 24 ore», 2 Ottobre 2011.

2 The video of the children trying to resist temptation is delightful (cfr. The Marshmallow Test: [http:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX\\_oy9614HQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614HQ)).

ter results at school, were more sociable and had higher self esteem than the others. About forty years later, the participants underwent another test (not to press a button when a smiling face appeared): the results of this test confirmed that those who were best at not responding immediately were those who had resisted the marshmallow. These adults were more successful in life and had a more satisfactory quality of life.

Question 1: how should we interpret the results of this experiment in terms of the theory of self? How should we define the tension between 'eating' and 'not eating' in terms of theory of self and creative adjustment?

How should we define the tension between 'eating' and 'not eating' in terms of theory of self and creative adjustment?

1.2 «What happens when your mother dies? How do you carry on living?» Giulia (aged 24, eight years in therapy, diagnosed as anorexic) asks me. We sit in silence, according to our practice, to let the resonances of this pregnant question emerge. After a while, we share a smile of mutual understanding: for both of us it is clear that we are also speaking about ourselves. And another question comes up: «What happens when therapy ends?» Giulia is asking (herself and me) what will happen when she no longer has her mother or her therapist. She is asking now because she feels almost ready to address a crucial moment in her life.

Question 2: is the objective of therapy contact competency or solitude competency? What is the specific perspective of Gestalt Therapy?

Is the objective of therapy contact competency or solitude competency? What is the specific perspective of Gestalt Therapy?

1.3 During a therapy session, I forget to turn my mobile off. When it rings, my patient asks me in an irritated tone to turn it off. I answer: «You're right. It's your right to ask me to turn off my mobile. Just one thing: is it okay if we talk about the fact that I detected irritation in your voice when you asked me? What were you feeling when you made that request?» «I didn't feel I had the right to ask... now I think about it, with my dad I never had rights, either....». «It seems to me» – I commented, remembering her ulcerative colitis – «that your power has been... bloodied». Her face lights up. She tells me that she feels her body opening up: she understands what makes her suffer...

What is the difference between power and aggressiveness? How does theory of self tackle the difference between power and aggressiveness?

Question 3: what is the difference between power and aggressiveness? How does theory of self tackle the difference between power and aggressiveness?

1.4 A mother confides to her twelve-year old daughter: «I'm suffering because I feel sexually neglected by your father». The daughter feels ill at ease.

Question 4: given that the mother's words are correct as far as communication is concerned, how does the theory of self explain the daughter's disquiet?

1.5 A recurring dream for many patients (and, in general, for many people) is that of having to take exams that, in reality, have been taken years before.

Question 5: what does this dream mean? How could we work on this dream using the theory of self?

1.6 In a workshop, a counsellor (aged 45) brings up a serious problem: «I would like to understand why and how I am seductive. It happened first with my dad when I was fifteen and then with a therapist. I sexually seduced both of them». The trainer – a gestaltist – asks her: «Do you know that you are beautiful?». She replies, almost fearfully: «No». And the work carries on along this trajectory.

Question number 6: does this woman's problem consist in not knowing that she is seductive or in not knowing that she is not responsible for what happened? What theory of self applies to this work?

1.7 We are in a group for training psychotherapists. The lesson is on the theory of self in Gestalt Therapy. Many participants request a break. Corrado, annoyed, rounds on them angrily, saying that taking a break is not right, that he is spending a fortune and that he considers taking so many breaks to be immature. The colleagues begin to answer. The trainer intervenes saying: «If I let you carry on this argument... I would feel unhappy about my Personality-function».

Question number 7: why would accepting the disagreement between Corrado and his colleagues have been an expression of a problem in the trainer's Personality-function?



## 2. Personality-function in Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality (GT). Exegetical exercises

As is well known, the text of GT<sup>3</sup> has to be read again and again as if it were the first time to rediscover its anthropological and clinical wisdom. Specifically, we will reread paragraph eight of chapter ten and passages from chapters eleven and thirteen. The Authors have already affirmed that the self in GT is not a *homunculus*, a *quid*, but a function. The self is the Organism in contact and has, amongst others, three structures usually described as follows: the Id (the body from which the movement towards something emerges: 'What I feel'), the Ego (to accept or alienate what emerges: 'What I want'), the Personality (assimilation after contact: 'What I have become').

2.1 *As aspects of the self in a simple spontaneous act, Id, Ego and Personality are the major stages of creative adjustment: the Id is the given background dissolving into its possibilities, including organic excitations and past unfinished situations becoming aware, and the environment vaguely perceived, and the inchoate feelings connecting organism and environment. The Ego is the progressive identification with and alienation of the possibilities, the limiting and heightening of the on-going contact, including motor behaviour, aggressing, orientation and manipulation. The Personality is the created figure that the self becomes and assimilates to the organism, uniting it with the results of previous growth. Obviously all this is just the figure/background process itself, and in such a simple case there is no need to dignify the stages with special names (10§5).*

3 The text, published in 1951, was made up of two parts. In the second edition (1994), edited by I. From and V. Miller, the parts were inverted. In this paper we are referring to the first part of the second edition: F. Perls, R. Hefferline, P. Goodman (1994)(or. ed. 1951), *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, The Gestalt Journal Press, New York.

The gestalt tradition has produced numerous clinical and theoretical reflections on these affirmations<sup>4</sup>. Now we will attempt to explore their theoretical and clinical ramifications through an exegetical analysis of the eighth paragraph of chapter ten.

The Personality exists in the moment in which it is embodied in a situation and so it 'invents and discovers itself' in the present situation.

The Personality is a structure that continually takes shape in placing itself and never becomes an object.

*2.2 The Personality, as a structure of the self, is again largely discovered-and-invented [...] is the system of attitudes assumed in interpersonal relations; is the assumption of what one is, serving as the ground on which one could explain one's behaviour, if the explanation were asked for (10§8).*

The affirmation that the Personality is a structure that is discovered and invented emphasises how the Personality, on one hand, is built up gradually (the word 'structure' in the text will become 'muscle') yet, on the other hand, it must remain flexible to every new situation. Just as my face does not exist without being a face-in-a-situation (to keep to the example in the text), similarly we might say that the Personality exists in the moment in which it is embodied in a situation and so it 'invents and discovers itself' in the present situation. That is almost to say that the Personality is a structure that continually takes shape in placing itself and never becomes an object.

*2.3 But the Personality is essentially a verbal replica of the self; it is that which answers a question or a self-question (10§8).*

Here it is affirmed that what the Personality boils down to is a subterranean dialogue of the Organism with itself and about itself: it is an endless dialogue which continually renews itself in the continuous embodiment of the Organism in contact (that is, of the self). This is simply because (if) this dialogue exists, one can give an answer to any request about the self. The phenomenological concept of 'sayability' is assumed as awareness<sup>5</sup>. A famous example is Perls'

4 Some famous contributions: L. Jacobs, P. Philippson, G. Wheeler (2007), *Self, Subject and Intersubjectivity: Gestalt Therapists reply to questions from the editors and from Daniel Stern and Michael Mahoney*, in «Studies in Gestalt Therapy», I, 1, 13-38; B. Kenoyer (2010), *The contradictions in Perls' sense of Self*, in «International Gestalt Journal», 33, 1, 5-26; F. Perls (2010), *Cooper Union Forum. Lecture Series: "The Self" Finding Self through Gestalt Therapy*, in «International Gestalt Journal», 33, 1, 27-51.

5 For further information see G. Salonia (1986), *La consapevolezza nella teoria e nella pratica della Psicoterapia della Gestalt*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», II, 3, 125-146.

dancer<sup>6</sup>: a dancer is aware if he is dancing without thinking about his dancing however, if he is asked, he must be able to talk about his experience. What the patient tells himself about his self (and the world) becomes, consequently, a necessary stage for the therapist. The famous affirmation that states that the Personality *is a verbal replica of the self* (10§8), and is capable of answering any question raised by the self, further underlines, implicitly but inevitably, the unbreakable connection (replica, to be exact!) between body and language. Language must always be an authentic copy of what happens (and has happened) in the Organism<sup>7</sup>.

Language must always be an authentic copy of what happens (and has happened) in the Organism.

2.4 *When the interpersonal behaviour is neurotic, the Personality consists of a number of mistaken concepts of oneself, introjects, ego-ideals, masks, etc. But when the therapy is concluded (and the same holds for any method of therapy), the Personality is a kind of framework of attitudes, understood by oneself, that can be used for every kind of interpersonal behaviour* (10§8).

From what has been said, the dividing line between the Personality at the beginning of therapy (the neurotic one) and the Personality at the end of therapy could be said to define the goal of therapy itself: it is to change the quality of the Personality.

A rigid Personality is not a *verbal replica* of experience, but a tangle of solidified, introjected experiences and projections that is unable to embody itself (and, consequently, to regenerate itself) in new realities and any present situation. The flexible Personality – more about which later – is “like water”, *assuming the form of the receptacle* (13§9): it does not have a predefined structure, but embodies itself in the concrete situation.

2.5 *[The Personality] is autonomous, responsible and self-known through and through as playing a definite role in the actual situation* (10§8).

At this point the Authors indicate some characteristics of the Personality which they then describe in detail and which I am going to analyse.

A rigid Personality is not a verbal replica of experience, but a tangle of solidified, introjected experiences and projections that is unable to embody itself (and, consequently, to regenerate itself) in new realities and any present situation.

6 F. Perls (1969) (or. ed. 1942), *Ego, hunger and aggression*, Vintage Books, New York.

7 See G. Salonia (2011), *Sulla felicità e dintorni. Tra corpo, parola e tempo*, Il pozzo di Giacobbe, Trapani.

Spontaneity, to be real, must be embodied in reality just as freedom must emerge from spontaneity.

*2.6 Autonomy must not be confused with spontaneity. It is free choosing and has always a sense of primary disengagement followed by commitment. The freedom is given by the fact that the ground of the activity has already been achieved: one commits oneself according to what one is, that is, has become (10§8).*

This statement immediately alerts us to the ambiguity of some gestal-  
tic slogans<sup>8</sup> that talk about 'spontaneity at the contact boundary', as if there could be spontaneity without freedom. Spontaneity, to be real, must be embodied in reality just as freedom must emerge from spontaneity: they are the premises of what will be called 'creative adjustment'. What the person has become is inevitably present in the contact cycle either as an obstacle or as a support.

*2.7 Autonomy is less extrinsically active than deliberateness and of course less extrinsically passive than relaxation, for it is one's own situation that one engages in according to one's role [...]. In spontaneous behaviour everything is novel and progressively made one's own; in autonomy the behaviour is one's own because in principle it has already been achieved and assimilated. The "actual situation" is really not novel, but a mirror image of the Personality; thus it is known to be one's own and one is secure (10§8).*

At this point, we need to underline how the novelty of the situation cannot be absolute but is embodied and written in the Personality. It is not therefore spontaneity freed from space and time but historically determined spontaneity, forming part of a life history, of a biography.

*2.8 The Personality is "transparent", it is known through and through, because it is the system of what has been recognized (in therapy, it is the structure of all the "Aha" insights). The self is not at all transparent in this sense – though it is aware and can orient itself – for its consciousness of self is in terms of the other in the actual situation (10§8).*

It is clear that in ideal situations *the self does not have much personality (13§9)*, in the sense that the self must remain free and flexible. A Personality which emerges from, unfinished

8 Cfr. G. Salonia (2011), *Requiem per gli slogan gestaltici. Intervento introduttivo al II convegno della Società Italiana Psicoterapia Gestalt*, in G. Francesetti et alii (eds.), *La creatività come identità terapeutica*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 51-54.

business, inflexible attitudes, *disastrous loyalties* (13§9), introjections, and projections becomes an obstacle to experience of contact. *The aftermath of contact (except annihilating) is accomplished growth* (13§4): learning, when it is digested rather than swallowed whole, is called assimilation: it can therefore be used in the same way that one's muscles are used.

2.9 Likewise, *Personality is responsible and can hold itself responsible in a sense that the creative self is not responsible. For responsibility is the filling out of a contract; a contract is made according to what one is, and responsibility is the further consistency of behaviour in this framework. But pure creativity cannot contract in this sense; its consistency comes to be as it goes along. Thus Personality is the responsible structure of the self* (10§8).

In other words, for creativity to be real it must be joined to responsibility, as the responsibility for not being a super-egoist must emerge from creativity: these are the theoretical bases of creative adjustment. To be responsible in creativity and creative in responsibility becomes a therapeutic objective.

To be responsible in creativity and creative in responsibility becomes a therapeutic objective.

2.10 *"The Ego consists in the feeling of unity, contiguity and continuity of the individual's body and mind in the proprioception of one's individuality... The Ego is a functional cathexis unit, changing with every actual thought and perception, but retaining the same feeling of its existence in distinct boundaries"* (11§2).

Here, in the eleventh chapter, the Authors happily quote a comment from Federn concerning the Ego. They affirm that this statement does not accurately describe the Ego but the Personality: *This is a fair description of what above (10§8) we have called the Personality. The self as such does not so much feel its own existence as the unity of its contacting* (11, note 3).

### **3. Rewriting the theory of self. Starting again from the Personality-function.**

As stated in chapter 13, number 9, growth is the ultimate objective of the contact cycle, but *it is the organism and not the self that grows* (13§9): growth happens unawares when aware contact is assimilated.



Considering the exegetical analysis of the text (chapters 10 and 13 in particular), a hermeneutic of the Personality-function emerges that declines a new grammar of the theory of self.

### 3.1 The 'novitas': the Personality-function is figure (and not background!) at the beginning of the contact cycle

This double-presence (of the Id and Personality functions) is what gives meaning to the Ego-function.

The Personality-function is an intimate, bodily, regulatory structure that results from all assimilated experiences the Ego-function, as P. Goodman reminds us, does not have the job of recording the upshot of a fight but of creating a novel solution through a process of identification and alienation

The active and decisive presence of the Personality-function in the very moment a need arises (Id-function) opens new horizons in the anthropological and clinical practice of Gestalt Therapy. To be attentive prevalently to the Id-function ('What I feel') creates confusion and leads one awry if one is not contextually careful of the 'Who I am that is feeling this' (Who I have become'). This double-presence (of the Id and Personality functions) is what gives meaning to the Ego-function. If, in fact, the Personality-function were not figure and were not active from the outset – the 'Who I am (have become) that is feeling' – then there would be an immediate movement directly from the 'What I feel' to the 'What I decide', emptying, as a consequence, the Ego-function of its job of accepting or refusing. This prospect – which reinterprets in an elegant theoretical framework Perls' famous *under-dog* and *top-dog* dialogue<sup>9</sup>, distances itself distinctly from the classical Freudian position that sees the Ego emerge as a result of the conflicts between the Id and the Super-ego. Above all, the concept of the Personality-function is qualitatively different from that of the Super-ego: the latter is an external regulatory structure, almost a foreign body that comes into play to regulate the Id whilst the Personality-function is an intimate, bodily, regulatory structure that results from all assimilated experiences (all the "Aha" says the text). For this reason, the Ego-function, as P. Goodman<sup>10</sup> reminds us, does not have the job of recording the upshot of a fight but of creating a novel solution through a process of identification and alienation. It is a solution – creative

<sup>9</sup> F. Perls (1969), *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, Real People Press, Lafayette, CA.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. P. Goodman (1995)(or. ed. 1966), *Individuo e comunità*, Eleuthera, Milano.



Each time that a conflict is conceived as irresolvable such that the Ego-function cannot operate, it becomes necessary to focalise both functions (Id and Personality).

The growth of the Organism occurs precisely when the Ego-function creates a *novitas* in a vibrant present that results from the Id-function that is projected towards the future (towards what one wants to become) and from the Personality-function, that is, the physiological radically present in what one has become.

adjustment – that covers all the *polemos*<sup>11</sup> between the two functions and reaches a new gestalt that is situated beyond the logic of ‘winner or loser’. If, in fact, the Id-function won, it would lead to anti-sociability just as there would be repression if the Personality-function ‘won’. Only solutions with these characteristics can be assimilated and make the Organism grow.

In neurotic conflicts, the Ego-function cannot carry out its task (identifying and alienating novelties that arise) because of malfunctions either of the Id-function (not knowing what is being felt) or of the Personality-function (values unassimilated, introjections, idealisations, chatter). Each time that a conflict is conceived as irresolvable such that the Ego-function cannot operate, it becomes necessary to focalise both functions (Id and Personality). It is interesting to notice how this *polemos* is registered at a physical level, producing different directions in two parts of the body. This is evident and visible, for example, in two eyes which sometimes express diametrically opposite emotions (one expresses the experience of the Id-function whilst the other that of the Personality-function)<sup>12</sup>.

The growth of the Organism occurs precisely when the Ego-function creates a *novitas* in a vibrant present that results from the Id-function that is projected towards the future (towards what one wants to become) and from the Personality-function, that is, the physiological radically present in what one has become.

Going back to the question in the first example (the marshmallow test), it is clear that the conflict that the child experiences between eating and waiting is between the two functions (Id and Personality). It is the Personality-function (having learnt how to wait) that will bring out the differences between the children. If a diabetic wants to eat sweet things, the conflict between the two functions (‘What I feel’ and ‘What I have become’) will be the ground on which the Ego-function will invent and discover a new solution that, if authentic, will be perceived as coherent and soothing for both functions (without, I repeat, winners and losers).

11 The text reminds us that precocious or impossible solutions indicate a malfunction of the Id-function and the Personality-function.

12 On a clinical level, it is a good strategy to let both eyes speak separately. Cfr. G. Salonia, *Il corpo nella Gestalt Therapy*, to be published shortly.

For the diabetic to find a creative solution, he must continue to feel (and not desensitize) his body which wants the sweet thing and, at the same time, have assimilated (Personality-function) in his body the fact that he has become diabetic. If these two functions are disturbed, the Ego-function will be absent and the conflict will become chronic, producing frustration rather than growth.

Let us take other examples for clinical work. The therapist shakes hands with the patient and the latter says he feels embarrassed. In order to understand his experience it is decisive to distinguish the Id-function from the Personality-function. Is the experience of embarrassment due to the fact that he does not realise what he is feeling in his hand (lack of sensibility or confusion concerning physical sensations) or to the fact that, even if he has felt his sensations clearly, he does not know what meaning to attribute to the experience?

Where this differential analysis becomes particularly necessary and decisive is in clinical work with people who have been abused. In fact, abuse which has confused the body (the girl was small and her body felt too many intense emotions together which were impossible to define) creates a problem in the Id-function: in a situation of abuse where the young girl clearly understood what was happening (she could say: «They are raping my body») but who did not know how to communicate it or could not manage to communicate it, a problem arises in the Personality-function<sup>13</sup>.

Abuse which has confused the body (the girl was small and her body felt too many intense emotions together which were impossible to define) creates a problem in the Id-function: in a situation of abuse where the young girl clearly understood what was happening (she could say: «They are raping my body») but who did not know how to communicate it or could not manage to communicate it, a problem arises in the Personality-function

### 3.2 The Personality-function as assimilation, that is, lived biography

After full contact, the Organism enters that mysterious and pathos-filled phase called *unaware assimilation* (10§5)(specific task of the Personality-function).

It should be emphasised in this re-reading that the assimilation, to be authentic and lasting, must be bodily. An experience of full contact (finally!) restructures the bodily scheme in terms of either integrity or fullness.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. <http://abusosessuale.forumattivo.it>, Forum for sexual abuse by E. Amenta.

The Personality becomes bodily memory of the Environment, that is, of the Other that the Organism has fully encountered: it becomes 'lived biography'

The Organism becomes... the full contacts it has experienced.

Thus, the Personality becomes bodily memory of the Environment, that is, of the Other that the Organism has fully encountered: it becomes 'lived biography'<sup>14</sup>, which differs from the 'chronological biography' – analogically – just as the anatomical body differs from the lived body<sup>15</sup>. In the initial instances (1.5), the recurrent dream of exams was cited, as if to indicate, almost, that the experiences in which the Ego-function is not involved cannot be assimilated. I remember a woman with post-partum psychosis who insisted on the fact that she did not know whether she had given birth or not and she suffered much anguish at the thought of still having to give birth. This aspect of the Personality-function (assimilation) is certainly the most well-known in the gestalt tradition, but precisely because it occurs without awareness it has been neglected<sup>16</sup>. Its importance, however, is decisive. *Learning, when it is digested and not swallowed whole, is said to be assimilated; it can then be used not otherwise than one's muscularity* (13§4). Finally, with a light touch, the Authors speak of the deep pathos which distinguishes assimilation, as if to emphasise – on one hand – the risk of trivialising it, and indicating – on the other – that this process points towards something which is both fascinating and mysterious<sup>17</sup>: the mystery of the encounter between Organism and Environment which nourishes us and helps us to grow. The Organism becomes... the full contacts it has experienced.

14 Recent research by A. Damasio on the 'autobiographical self' appears to be the scientific correlate of lived biography. Cfr. A. Damasio (2010), *Il sé viene alla mente. La costruzione del cervello cosciente*, Adelphi, Milano; Cfr. also G. Salonia, *Il corpo nella Gestalt Therapy*, cit.

15 G. Salonia (2008), *La Psicoterapia della Gestalt e il lavoro sul corpo. Per una rilettura del fitness*, in S. Vero (ed.), *Il corpo disabitato. Semiologia, fenomenologia e psicopatologia del fitness*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 51-81.

16 In a Gestalt convention, after speaking about Personality-function, a leader commented with an air of irritation: «Personality-function occurs without awareness, so why talk about it?».

17 I like to refer to the definition of the encounter given by phenomenology: *Gnade und Geheimnis* (Grace and Mystery). For these themes see B. Calleri (1993), *Aspetti antropofenomenologici dell'incontro con la persona delirante*, in «Rivista di Psichiatria», 28, 303-309.



### 3.3. The interruptions of contact as problems of the Personality-function

The intimate connection between Id-function and Personality-function offers an original theoretical and clinical perspective even as far as understanding interruptions in contact.

The interaction between Organism/Environment is interrupted, as we know, in the moment in which the breathing which has been activated by the intentionality to move towards the Environment, instead of opening itself up, closes in on itself (*angustus*) because of a lack of specific support<sup>18</sup>. The interruption of the bodily process and the lack of specific support are the phenomenological transcription of the interruption and concern respectively the Id-function and the Personality-function.

To re-read interruptions in this perspective highlights both the bodily block (repressed body, numbed, etc.) and the disturbance in the Personality-function (feeling unwarrantedly bigger or smaller than the Environment). In introjections, for example, the confrontation/conflict between the Id-function and the Personality-function does not achieve a creative solution because the Personality-function is not formed by assimilated experiences but by introjections<sup>19</sup>. In projecting, breathing closes up and sees what the body is experiencing from the outside because – at the level of Personality-function – the Organism perceives itself as small compared to the Environment. Retroflexion is the polar opposite of distorted perception: the Environment is perceived as too small and incapable of containing the tension that the Organism therefore directs back to its own body.

The intimate connection between Id-function and Personality-function offers an original theoretical and clinical perspective even as far as understanding interruptions in contact.

The interruption of the bodily process and the lack of specific support are the phenomenological transcription of the interruption and concern respectively the Id-function and the Personality-function.

18 Cfr. G. Salonia (2010), *L'anxiety come interruzione nella Gestalt Therapy*, in L. D. Regazzo (ed.), *Ansia, che fare? Prevenzione, farmacoterapia e psicoterapia*, CLEUP, Padova, 233-254.

19 In Gestalt Therapy, it is not a question of changing thoughts – as it is in the cognitive perspective (seeking to modify irrational convictions) – but to work on the assimilation of experiences to create and foster the formation of a Personality as a result of the assimilations.

### 3.4 The Personality-function as the 'verbal replica of the self': language in Gestalt Therapy

Every experience has to be expressible. To be expressible – which in Gestalt Therapy could be defined as 'awareness' – is rooted in experience.

The Personality-function in Gestalt Therapy concerns the thoughts connected with experience, that is, with 'bodily' thoughts.

Only if it is a copy of the self do the words vibrate with the fullness and the uniqueness of the experience and become the poetry of inter-corporality and contact intentionality.

Twice Goodman talks about the Personality-function as the capacity to respond to whatever questions about personal experience, about the emotional flux that the body lives. This affirmation refers to, as I have said, a sort of internal dialogue<sup>20</sup> – like that of Carsia – that flows in every Organism. In other words, every experience has to be expressible. To be expressible – which in Gestalt Therapy could be defined as 'awareness'<sup>21</sup> – is rooted in experience. With great intuition, the text of GT sees language as the verbal copy of the self: the language-experience (and not Heidegger's empty '*Man sigt*'<sup>22</sup>) is intimately connected with the body. That is why words – carefully listened to (sounds, pauses, grammar and syntax)<sup>23</sup> – becomes the depth of the surface<sup>24</sup>. Conversely, the Personality-function in Gestalt Therapy concerns the thoughts connected with experience, that is, with 'bodily' thoughts. Here too, it is not a return to the 'aboutism' that Perls referred to which concerns thoughts which are disconnected from the body, nor is it a system of cognitive representations like that of cognitive therapy which concerns rational or irrational thoughts). The quality of interpersonal dialogue (are the words a verbal copy or are they disconnected from experience?) determines the quality of the contact<sup>25</sup>. Only if it is a copy of the self do the words vibrate with the fullness and the uniqueness of the experience and become the poetry of inter-corporality and contact intentionality.

20 G. Salonia, C. Di Cicco (1982), *Dialogo interno e dialogo esterno: contributo per un'integrazione della terapia cognitiva con principi e tecniche della comunicazione interpersonale*, in «Formazione psichiatrica», III, 1, 179-194.

21 G. Salonia (1986), *La consapevolezza nella teoria e nella pratica della Psicoterapia della Gestalt*, cit.

22 The words of 'People say' is linked to neurotic chatter and psychotic stereotypes which do not arise from the subject's experience but which block access to it: repeated phrases disconnected from the body, without personal assimilation.

23 Cfr. G. Salonia (2011), *Sulla felicità e dintorni. Tra corpo, parola e tempo*, cit.

24 From another perspective, Irigaray's work on the relationship between language and symptoms is interesting: L. Irigaray (1991) (or. ed. 1985), *Parlare non è mai neutro*, Editori Riuniti, Roma.

25 H. Franta, G. Salonia (1979), *Comunicazione Interpersonale*, LAS, Roma.

### 3.5 When is the Personality formed?

The book's reply to this question is 'between two and three years' (7§1). This coincides, coherently, with language development (forty years later, Stern will talk about the verbal-self and the narrative-self)<sup>26</sup>. At this age, in fact, words begin to be connected to experiences of one's own and other bodies, taking shape and becoming narration. What comes to mind is Aristotle's intuition that human beings are capable of grammar. Repetitive sounds, jumbles of words, ungrammatical expressions, syntactical errors, use of pronouns... are the verbal copy of growth or of problems in the Organism<sup>27</sup>. Language which matures in full contact – as Goodman reminds us, anticipating Stern's 'narrative self'<sup>28</sup> – has a triadic paradigm: it is full of the speaker's body, of the recipient's body, of going to and fro from one to the other without fusion or rigidity<sup>29</sup>.

Language which matures in full contact – as Goodman reminds us, anticipating Stern's 'narrative self' – has a triadic paradigm: it is full of the speaker's body, of the recipient's body, of going to and fro from one to the other without fusion or rigidity

### 3.6 Personality-function, intrapersonal contact, creative solitude

The reference to internal dialogue brings us to the category of intrapersonal contact as the point of arrival of growth and therapy. This is a focus which is often neglected, perhaps, to avoid an intra-psychical vision of reality. The difference between intra-psychical and intrapersonal is determined by the fact that the term intra-psychical refers to a prospective which is divorced from reality and from the relational dimension while intraper-

26 D. Stern (1987) (or. ed. 1985), *Il mondo interpersonale del bambino*, Bollati-Boringhieri, Torino.

27 Cfr. G. Salonia (2001), *Disagio psichico e risorse relazionali*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», XVII, 32/33, 13-23. An interesting analysis of language confined to a limited number of pathologies is Irigaray's: L. Irigaray (1991)(or. ed. 1985), *Parlare non è mai neutro*, cit.

28 It is interesting to note that for Goodman language takes shape (use of grammar and narrative quality) at about three years, exactly where Stern will situate the Verbal-Self.

29 Cfr. G. Salonia, *Il paradigma triadico della traità. I contributi della Gestalt Therapy e di Bin Kimura*, in B. Kimura, *Tra*, Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, Trapani, in press.

Intrapersonal is a term used to refer to a specific moment in the contact cycle/retreating from contact (the assimilation which follows or anticipates the experience of contact): that being with oneself in the moment of the long wave of 'contact withdrawal'.

sonal is a term used to refer to a specific moment in the contact cycle/retreating from contact (the assimilation which follows or anticipates the experience of contact): that being with oneself in the moment of the long wave of 'contact withdrawal'<sup>30</sup>.

As said elsewhere, there are three types of betweenness or contact<sup>31</sup>: *archè*-betweenness, intrapersonal betweenness and interpersonal betweenness.

*Archè*-betweenness (primary betweenness) refers to the asymmetrical relationship of growth or care in which one of the partners facilitates the emergence of intrapersonal contact (the relationship with one's self) in the other. The objective of therapy is – as we have seen – the growth of the Personality: that is, the assimilation, the 'intrapersonal dialogue' as a verbal copy of the self in contact. It is not dysfunctional solitude (connected to fear or excessive self-reliance) but creative solitude in which contact is assimilated, one grows and expresses one's individual creativity.

To go back to one of our initial questions (1.2), and to Giulia who asked herself what would happen after a separation from a significant other, I answer that she will feel within her body when she is ready to make her path in the world 'alone'. This will happen only after she has taken everything she needs from vital developmental experiences of 'full contact'<sup>32</sup>.

Relationships with parents and/or therapists (asymmetrical relationships<sup>33</sup>) are there to enable us to be comfortable with ourselves and then (in an epistemological sense) with others: in neurotic solitude, people are trapped in confluence which has been interrupted too early whilst in fertile solitude (the fertile

30 I remember how both M. Polster and J. Zinker advised us, in seminars, *en passant*, that a contact cycle includes withdrawal from contact, so it would be more appropriate to always write 'contact cycle/contact withdrawal'.

31 In the reworking of this concept, I have drawn upon Bin Kimura's expository clarity. Cfr. G. Salonia, *Il paradigma triadico della trinità. I contributi della Gestalt Therapy e di Bin Kimura*, cit.

32 For more about the quality of contact in developmental theory see: G. Salonia (2005), *Prefazione*, in P.L. Righetti, *Ogni bambino merita un romanzo*, Carocci Faber, Roma.

33 In my opinion, a limit of GT is not having emphasised enough the difference between symmetrical and asymmetrical contact. See: H. Franta, G. Salonia (1979), *Comunicazione interpersonale. Teoria e Pratica*, cit.





vacuum Perls speaks of) there is the assimilation of a full experience of growth. The medieval philosopher Duns Scotus aptly put it like this: *Ad personam requiritur ultima solitudo*<sup>34</sup>.

### 3.7 The Personality function: Arianna's thread in Gestalt family therapy

The area in which the lack of attention and reflection about the Personality-function in the history of Gestalt Therapy is most evident is in work with families (and couples).

The area in which the lack of attention and reflection about the Personality-function in the history of Gestalt Therapy is most evident is in work with families (and couples).

At first, in fact, the gestalt therapists who worked with families concentrated on the Id-function, focussing on the family's experiential block. However, therapeutic work with families turned out to be more complex and not equivalent to working with individuals.

Subsequently, gestalt therapists<sup>35</sup> introduced a focus on the contact cycle in family therapy and, in particular, on the Ego-function. This innovation, whilst resulting very effective in work with couples (consider, for example, the effectiveness of dialogue between partners), did not turn out to be equally useful in work with families and so (introjections of ?) two fundamental concepts of Systemic-Structural Family Therapy were introduced: the family's vital cycle and the family structure/generational line<sup>36</sup>. This operation certainly, at an epistemological level, was mistaken... almost a juxtaposition.

34 For there to be a Person(ality), there has to be the ability for radical solitude: being with yourself or, as the Ancients said, *habitare secum*.

35 For Joseph Zinker and Sonia Nevis' model see: J. Zinker, S. Nevis (1987), *Teoria della Gestalt sulle interazioni di coppia e familiari*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt» III, 4, 17-32. Also see: C. Hatcher (1987), *Modelli intrapersonali e interpersonali: integrazione della Gestalt con le terapie familiari*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 33-44; G. Salonia (1987), *Il lavoro gestaltico con le coppie e le famiglie: il ciclo vitale e l'integrazione delle polarità*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 144-155.

36 Cfr. J. M. Robine (1987), *Terapia della Gestalt e Terapia Familiare Strutturale. Intervista a Barbara Frank-Lynch* in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 51-58; R. Lampert (1987), *Terapia della Gestalt e Terapia della Famiglia: un buon matrimonio*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 59-73; S. Minuchin (1980)(or. ed. 1978), *Famiglie Psicosomatiche*, Astrolabio, Roma; E. Scabini (1985), *L'organizzazione famiglia fra crisi e sviluppo*, Franco Angeli, Milano; E. M. Duvall (1977), *Family Development*, Lippincott, Philadelphia.

In my model of Gestalt Therapy with families<sup>37</sup>, I show that some previous omissions were due to a lack of attention towards the Personality-function. Indeed, the generational line and family structure are elegantly, originally and clinically – effectively included in the Personality-function (of the parents) and the vital cycle in Gestalt Therapy is found in the specific concept of personal history assimilated in the body (lived biography). Attention dedicated to the Personality-function in family therapy becomes like Arianna's thread because there is more clarity when working with the Id-function and the Ego-function. Work on the parents' Personality-function is the fulcrum of clear and effective work on the family<sup>38</sup>.

Even with couples, work on the Id-function should be 'inside' the attention and work dedicated to the Personality-function (physical memory of the relationship)<sup>39</sup>.

Coherently with the Gestalt re-reading of the Oedipus complex<sup>40</sup>, problems with parental Personality-function, in reality, turn out to be the matrix of psychological problems in the family: from these stem (or they are connected to) the other problems with Id-function and the lack of Ego-function (of a complete and nourishing contact/contact withdrawal cycle).

### 3.8 Personality-function: interpretative key of the therapeutic relationship

In the history of psychotherapy, from the very beginning there has been the problem of what meaning to attribute to the possible involvement of the therapist in the relationship with the pa-

In my model of Gestalt Therapy with families, I show that some previous omissions were due to a lack of attention towards the Personality-function.

Work on the parents' Personality-function is the fulcrum of clear and effective work on the family

Problems with parental Personality-function, in reality, turn out to be the matrix of psychological problems in the family: from these stem (or they are connected to) the other problems with Id-function and the lack of Ego-function (of a complete and nourishing contact/contact withdrawal cycle).

37 I present it thoroughly in G. Salonia (2010), *Lettera ad un giovane psicoterapeuta della Gestalt. Per un modello di Gestalt Therapy con la famiglia*, in M. Menditto (ed.), *Psicoterapia della Gestalt contemporanea. Strumenti ed esperienze a confronto*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 185-202.

38 P. Goodman (1995)(or. ed. 1966), *Individuo e comunità*, cit.

39 V. Conte (1998/99), *Dalla appartenenza alla individuazione: come restare coppia*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», XIV-XV, 26/29, 134-136.

40 G. Salonia (2005), *Il lungo viaggio di Edipo: dalla legge del padre alla verità della relazione*, in P. Argentino (ed.), *Tragedie greche e psicopatologia*, Medicalink Publishers, Siracusa, 29-46.

Theory of self in Gestalt Therapy offers a decisive interpretative key which situates transfer and counter-transfer in the realm of the Personality-function

Interpreting seduction in the therapeutic setting outside the context of 'parental' care (and, consequently, of the Personality-function) creates confusion, upset and inevitably places demands on an essential but fragile Super-ego

It is not the child who has incestuous feelings towards his mother but it is the disturbances in the co-parental Personality-function that causes confusion in the child about his position.

tient<sup>41</sup>. Transfer and counter-transfer have become crucial knots in the comprehension and practice of the analytical process.

Theory of self in Gestalt Therapy offers a decisive interpretative key which situates transfer and counter-transfer in the realm of the Personality-function: since the therapist-patient relationship is an asymmetrical one (of care), it analogically refers back to the parent/child one. Simplifying for didactic purposes: possible sexual advances from a patient should be interpreted as clumsy attempts by the patient to reach a father figure and require a spontaneous and therapeutic paternal reaction: they certainly do not call for defining a patient as 'seductive'. It is obvious that, in order to do this, the therapist must trust his own Personality-function and understand the patient's Personality-function. In fact, interpreting seduction in the therapeutic setting outside the context of 'parental' care (and, consequently, of the Personality-function) creates confusion, upset<sup>42</sup> and inevitably places demands on an essential but fragile Super-ego.

In practice, the Gestalt Therapy reinterpretation of the Oedipus complex is where it differs from Freudian theory<sup>43</sup>: it is not the child who has incestuous feelings towards his mother but it is the disturbances in the co-parental Personality-function that causes confusion in the child about his position. No child, no patient feels in his body incestuous urges to seduce his parents: if this happens it is due to the fact that the parents/therapists have a distorted perception and see as partners (sexual or sparring) people that they have to take care of or who – in Gestalt terms – have a malfunction in the Personality-function.

To go back to question 1.6 about the patient who defined herself as 'seductive' because she had had sexual intercourse with her father and therapist, I believe that it was a (perhaps serious) mistake to have worked on the patient's difficulty in being aware of her power of seduction. This choice of direction, in

41 To explore the difficulties and complexities see Carotenuto's book on double transference: A. Carotenuto (1986), *La colomba di Kant*, Bompiani, Milano.

42 It is certainly stimulating to read in this interpretative key: H.S. Krutzenbichler, H. Essers (1993), *Se l'amore in sé non è peccato... Sul desiderio dell'analista*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.

43 G. Salonia (2005), *Il lungo viaggio di Edipo: dalla legge del padre alla verità della relazione*, cit.

fact, laid all the responsibility on the patient when (without doubt) it belonged to the parent and therapist<sup>44</sup>.

### 3.9 Personality-function, responsibility, personal power

Let us take up to questions posed at the beginning. First, number 1.7. A student complains about the length of the breaks that his colleagues request in a training course. If the trainer supports or allows an argument between the students for/against breaks, he manipulates the interaction since only he has ultimate responsibility for whether there is a break or not. If he does not understand that the objection about the length of the breaks is aimed at him, he evinces a disturbance in Personality-function and supports that malfunction in the students.

We find that number 1.3, where the patient was irritated because the therapist had left his mobile on and the therapist had to admit the legitimacy of the request, is in the same therapeutic vein. If he invites the patient to work on aggression, then he will create confusion which will aggravate the problem<sup>45</sup>. A frequent example is given when, in training sessions, when students' complaints (about the school or the trainers) are answered by focussing attention on the student's aggression instead of taking into consideration the real contents of the protests. In particular, in asymmetrical relationships, one must be very careful about recognising the power of people who are in the down position, avoiding dwelling only on the improper ways in which power may be expressed.

### 3.10 Priority of Personality-function in clinical work

Even if at first it might seem odd, on a clinical level starting from the presupposition that the Personality-function precedes

44 Every therapeutic path should have as its ground clarity of Personality-function in every person in interaction.

45 I analysed this interaction in detail concerning the theme of power in Gestalt Therapy in G. Salonia (2011), *The Perls' mistake. Insights and misunderstandings in Gestalt post-Freudianis*, in «GTK Journal of Psychotherapy», 2, 51-70.

Even when in Gestalt developmental theory we talk about the absence of specific primary support lying at the root of the problem of the Id-function, do we not implicitly talk about a parental figure with a problem in Personality-function?

Does the way in which the therapist and patient perceive each other on an inter-corporeal level (tension and openness regarding the other's body) not represent the focus of therapy?

the Id-function has proven to be very effective. Any disturbance in the Id-function, in effect, is found in a disturbance of the Personality-function: if I feel hungry instead of feeling real sexual desire, this disturbance of the Id-function is situated in a problem of Personality-function. It means, in fact, that the patient has not grown up in a coherent manner. Even when in Gestalt developmental theory<sup>46</sup> we talk about the absence of specific primary support lying at the root of the problem of the Id-function, do we not implicitly talk about a parental figure with a problem in Personality-function?

Reflecting more deeply, is it not perhaps evident that the therapeutic relationship is based on Personality-function, that is, how the therapist's body has assimilated his being a therapist (and he does not experience it as a bundle of techniques and deontology) and how the patient's body has not assimilated his personal biography? Does the way in which the therapist and patient perceive each other on an inter-corporeal level (tension and openness regarding the other's body) not represent the focus of therapy? For example, the patient with a narcissistic relationship modality, even though in the therapeutic process, will need time before he can define himself as a 'patient'<sup>47</sup>.

The basic text (cfr. 2.3) is absolutely right when it talks about the Personality as the place where therapeutic change occurs.

#### 4. Personality-function: the original regulatory instance in the liquid society

Goodman's pages on the Personality-function require careful reading because he writes in a historical period in which the Personality was created by a mass of introjections, instances taken from institutions and the Super-ego, political or religious idealism, all of which repressed the Id-function. The cultural trend – of which Goodman was a participant – was directed towards the liberation of the Id, the body, and geared towards

46 Cfr. G. Salonia (2005), *Prefazione*, in P.L. Righetti, *Ogni bambino merita un romanzo*, cit.

47 More thoughts on narcissistic pathology in G. Salonia (2003), *Il narcisismo come ferita relazionale*, in «Horeb», 32, 48-54.



spontaneity, creativity, and subjectivity. Goodman is clearly sympathetic towards the Id-function, however – given the refined and special intellectual that he is – he could not avoid writing (despite, in my opinion, a certain embarrassment) about the Gestalt concept of the Personality: a Personality tied to experience, the verbal copy of the self, bodily memory of contact experience. In having to bring the therapeutic agenda up-to-date (Personality-function)<sup>48</sup> – a job frequently neglected by therapists – we realise that today what is problematical is precisely the Personality-function. In a recent interview, Mark Solms affirmed that: «In future above all we will be dealing with ‘managing’ emotions rather than bringing them to light»<sup>49</sup>. The specific nature of Gestalt Therapy is to offer an interpretative key for ‘managing emotions’ which, in an original manner, does not aim at recuperating external deontological instances from the Super-ego but is situated inside the Organism in contact with the Environment.

It is precisely in the functions of the self (organism in relation) that regulation must occur: it is a self-regulation that emerges from the Organism in relation. The task of the Ego-function is to create a new Gestalt which is intimately connected with the Organism, between the Id-function and the Personality-function. In a society which lives out the logic of experimentation (the disposable culture) without assimilation and which has relationship phobia<sup>50</sup> and rejects – like a prolonged adolescence – the physical contours for identity and belonging, learning how to assimilate (a Personality-function) in order to keep the freshness of the experience becomes crucial. To re-read times and manners,

The specific nature of Gestalt Therapy is to offer an interpretative key for ‘managing emotions’ which, in an original manner, does not aim at recuperating external deontological instances from the Super-ego but is situated inside the Organism in contact with the Environment.

The task of the Ego-function is to create a new Gestalt which is intimately connected with the Organism, between the Id-function and the Personality-function.

48 As From affirms, «Any development of Gestalt Theory must follow on from that theory [Goodman’s][...]. The resurrection of Gestalt Therapy [...] not from what is dead, but from what has been left out»: I. From (1985), *Requiem for Gestalt*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», I, 1, 22-32, 32.

49 M. Solms (2012), *La coscienza comincia dall’Es*, in «Psicologia Contemporanea», 233, 6-13, 11. In the interview Solms revisits the contents of his presentation at the 12th International Neuropsychanalysis Congress: *Minding the Body* (Berlin, 24-26 June, 2011).

50 G. Salonia (2011), *L’improvviso, inesplicabile sparire dell’Altro. Depressione, psicoterapia della Gestalt e postmodernità*, in G. Francesetti, M. Gecele (eds.), *L’altro irraggiungibile*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 47-64.

Today it is necessary to conjugate the affirmation 'I feel' with the synchronic question of 'Who am I, the one who feels?' it is in this that the evaluative criterion of self-awareness lies.

Gestalt Therapy proposes the confines that conjugate creativity and adjustment, spontaneity and responsibility, Id-function and Personality-function to the liquid society: it offers a Personality that has the strength and the fluidity... of water.

risks and riches, conditions and opportunities of the process of assimilation of experience has become, in the post-modern age, on one hand an unavoidable instance to bring Gestalt Therapy up-to-date<sup>51</sup> and, on the other, a necessary developmental task. It is a matter of rediscovering interiority understood as a subjective place of listening and of assimilation of experience of contact, the 'fertile vacuum' as the genuine source of creativity<sup>52</sup>. Today it is necessary to conjugate the affirmation 'I feel' with the synchronic question of 'Who am I, the one who feels?' it is in this that the evaluative criterion of self-awareness lies.

A young lad confronts the teacher or lecturer by confidently saying: «What you are saying does not convince me». This is surely a fine example of self-confidence and self-esteem, but if it is not to become sterile arrogance that lad should add: «I am a boy who has only read one newspaper article on this subject. Perhaps that is why I should use a question mark and not an exclamation mark».

Today's society has difficulty precisely with Personality-function. It fears assimilation as the loss of spontaneity and opportunity or as a tie. Therefore, it risks fragile, empty and discontented identities. Bauman has spoken of the 'liquid society' to indicate this difficulty in assimilating experience<sup>53</sup>.

Our Authors, sixty years ago, wrote: *In ideal circumstances the self does not have much Personality. It is the sage of Tao that is "like water", assuming the form of the receptacle (13§9)*<sup>54</sup>. They contemplated a Personality capable of feeling the thrust of emotions but also of growing without becoming rigid. In other words, Gestalt Therapy proposes the confines that conjugate creativity and adjustment, spontaneity and responsibility, Id-function and Personality-function to the liquid society: it offers a Personality that has the strength and the fluidity... of water.

51 Cfr. G. Salonia (1989), *Tempi e modi di contatto*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», V, 8/9, 55-64.

52 Cfr. A. Sichera (1994), *Per una rilettura di 'Requiem for Gestalt'*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», X, 18/19, 81-90.

53 Z. Bauman (2002), *Modernità liquida*, Laterza, Bari.

54 See for some important comments: D. Iacono, G. Maltese (2012), *Come l'acqua. Per un'esperienza gestaltica con i bambini tra rabbia e paura*, Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, Trapani.

## REFERENCES

- Bauman** Z. (2002), *Modernità liquida*, Laterza, Bari.
- Callieri** B. (1993), *Aspetti antropofenomenologici dell'incontro con la persona delirante*, in «Rivista di Psichiatria», 28, 303-309.
- Carotenuto** A. (1986), *La colomba di Kant*, Bompiani, Milano.
- Casey** B.J. et alii (2011), *Behavioral and neural correlates of delay gratification 40 years later*, Pnas, August 29th 2011, in «Il sole 24 ore», 2 Ottobre 2011.
- Conte** V. (1998/99), *Dalla appartenenza alla individuazione: come restare coppia*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», XIV-XV, 26/29, 134-136.
- Damasio** A. (2010), *Il sé viene alla mente. La costruzione del cervello cosciente*, Adelphi, Milano.
- Duvall** E.M. (1977), *Family Development*, Lippincott, Philadelphia.
- Franta** H., **Salonia** G. (1979), *Comunicazione interpersonale. Teoria e pratica*, LAS, Roma.
- From** I. (1985), *Requiem for Gestalt*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», I, 1, 22-32.
- Goodman** P. (1995) (or. ed. 1966), *Individuo e comunità*, Eleuthera, Milano.
- Hatcher** C. (1987), *Modelli intrapersonali e interpersonali: integrazione della Gestalt con le terapie familiari*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 33-44.
- Iacono** D., **Maltese** G. (2012), *Come l'acqua. Per un'esperienza gestaltica con i bambini tra rabbia e paura*, Il pozzo di Giacobbe, Trapani.
- Irigaray** L. (1991) (or. ed. 1985), *Parlare non è mai neutro*, Editori Riuniti, Roma.
- Jacobs** L., **Philipson** P., **Wheeler** G. (2007), *Self, Subject and Intersubjectivity: Gestalt Therapists reply to questions from the editors and from Daniel Stern and Michael Mahoney*, in «Studies in Gestalt Therapy», I, 1, 13-38.
- Kenofer** B. (2010), *The contradictions within Perls' sense of Self*, in «International Gestalt Journal», 33, 1, 5-26.
- Krutzenbichler** H.S., **Essers** H. (1993), *Se l'amore in sé non è peccato... Sul desiderio dell'analista*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.
- Lampert** R. (1987), *Terapia della Gestalt e Terapia della Famiglia: un buon matrimonio*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 59-73.
- Minuchin** S. (1980) (or. ed. 1978), *Famiglie psicosomatiche*, Astrolabio, Roma.
- Perls**, F. (1969) (or. ed. 1942), *Ego, Hunger and Aggression*, Vintage Books, New York.

- Perls F.** (1969), *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, Real People Press, Lafayette, CA.
- Perls F.** (2010), *Cooper Union Forum. Lecture Series: "The Self" Finding Self through Gestalt Therapy*, in «International Gestalt Journal», 33, 1, 27-51.
- Perls F., Hefferline R., Goodman P.** (1994)(or. ed. 1951), *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, The Gestalt Journal Press, New York.
- Robine J.M.** (1987), *Terapia della Gestalt e Terapia Familiare Strutturale. Intervista a Barbara De Frank-Lynch*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 51-58.
- Salonia G.** (1986), *La consapevolezza nella teoria e nella pratica della Psicoterapia della Gestalt*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», II, 3, 125-146.
- Salonia G.** (1987), *Il lavoro gestaltico con le coppie e le famiglie: il ciclo vitale e l'integrazione delle polarità*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 144-155.
- Salonia G.** (1989), *Tempi e modi di contatto*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», V, 8/9, 55-64.
- Salonia G.** (2001), *Disagio psichico e risorse relazionali*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», XVII, 32/33, 13-23.
- Salonia G.** (2003), *Il narcisismo come ferita relazionale*, in «Horeb», 32, 48-54.
- Salonia G.** (2005), *Prefazione*, in Righetti P.L., *Ogni bambino merita un romanzo*, Carocci Faber, Roma, 7-19.
- Salonia G.** (2005), *Il lungo viaggio di Edipo: dalla legge del padre alla verità della relazione*, in Argentino P. (ed.), *Tragedie greche e psicopatologia*, Medicalink Publishers, Siracusa, 29-46.
- Salonia G.** (2008), *La psicoterapia della Gestalt e il lavoro sul corpo. Per una rilettura del fitness*, in Vero S. (ed.), *Il corpo disabitato. Semiologia, fenomenologia e psicopatologia del fitness*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 51-81.
- Salonia G.** (2010), *Lettera ad un giovane psicoterapeuta della Gestalt. Per un modello di Gestalt Therapy con la famiglia*, in Menditto M. (ed.), *Psicoterapia della Gestalt contemporanea. Strumenti ed esperienze a confronto*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 185-202.
- Salonia G.** (2010), *L'anxiety come interruzione nella Gestalt Therapy*, in Regazzo L.D. (ed.), *Ansia, che fare? Prevenzione, farmacoterapia e psicoterapia*, CLEUP, Padova, 233-254.
- Salonia G.** (2011), *Sulla felicità e dintorni. Tra corpo, parola e tempo*, Il pozzo di Giacobbe, Trapani.
- Salonia G.** (2011), *Requiem per gli slogan gestaltici. Intervento introduttivo al II convegno della Società Italiana Psicoterapia Gestalt*, in Francesetti G. et alii (eds.), *La creatività come identità terapeutica*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 51-54.

**Salonia G.** (2011), *L'improvviso, inesplicabile sparire dell'Altro. Depressione, psicoterapia della Gestalt e postmodernità*, in Francesetti G., Gecele M. (eds.), *L'altro irraggiungibile*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 47-64.

**Salonia G.** (2011), *The Perls' mistake. Insights and misunderstandings in Gestalt post-Freudianis*, in «GTK Journal of Psychotherapy», 2, 51-70.

**Salonia G.**, *Il paradigma triadico della traità. I contributi della Gestalt Therapy e di Bin Kimura*, in Kimura B., *Tra, Il Pozzo di Giacobbe*, Trapani, in press.

**Salonia G.**, *Il corpo nella Gestalt Therapy*, to be published shortly.

**Salonia G., Di Cicco C.** (1982), *Dialogo interno e dialogo esterno: contributo per un'integrazione della terapia cognitiva con principi e tecniche della comunicazione interpersonale*, in «Formazione psichiatrica», III, 1, 179-194.

**Scabini E.** (1985), *L'organizzazione famiglia fra crisi e sviluppo*, Franco Angeli, Milano.

**Sichera A.** (1994), *Per una rilettura di 'Requiem for Gestalt'*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», X, 18/19, 81-90.

**Solms M.** (2012), *La coscienza comincia dall'Es*, in «Psicologia Contemporanea», 233, 6-13.

**Stern D.** (1987) (or. ed. 1985), *Il mondo interpersonale del bambino*, Bollati-Boringhieri, Torino.

**Zinker J., Nevis S.** (1987), *Teoria della Gestalt sulle interazioni di coppia e familiari*, in «Quaderni di Gestalt», III, 4, 17-32.

## SITE LINKS

<http://abusosessuale.forumattivo.it>, Forum for sexual abuse by E. Amenta.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX\\_oy9614HQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614HQ), The Marshmallow Test.

## Abstract

The Author begins from real situations of conflict (in clinical practice or training) to show how, through a reinterpretation of the Personality-function of the self in Gestalt Therapy, a level of clarity and awareness is reached that avoids (on a clinical and educational level) confused, confusing or subtly manipulative practices. An exact exegesis of *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, brings to light frequently neglected or superficially-studied aspects of Perls and Goodman's rich reflections on theory of the self (in particular, chapter ten of the first part: *Novelty, Excitement and Growth*). As I. From taught, any updating/renewal of Gestalt Therapy should be based on neglected theoretical or clinical aspects. Whilst at the time that Gestalt Therapy emerged it was the Id-function that required attention and support, in the post-modern and ever more liquid age, the need to dedicate attention to the Personality-function in its various declinations is widely perceived (and shared). The facets of the Personality-function are: 'the feeling person' faced with 'things' and 'what' he feels; the assimilation of experiences compared to irresponsible spontaneity; the bodily memory as identity compared to a naive emphasis on the present. Starting again from the Personality-function leads to a revision (genuinely gestaltic, and gestaltically attentive towards post-modernism) of the theory of self.





In quel bosco nero presto fioriranno in bucaneve







Il vento continua a soffiare e a ruggire nel bosco

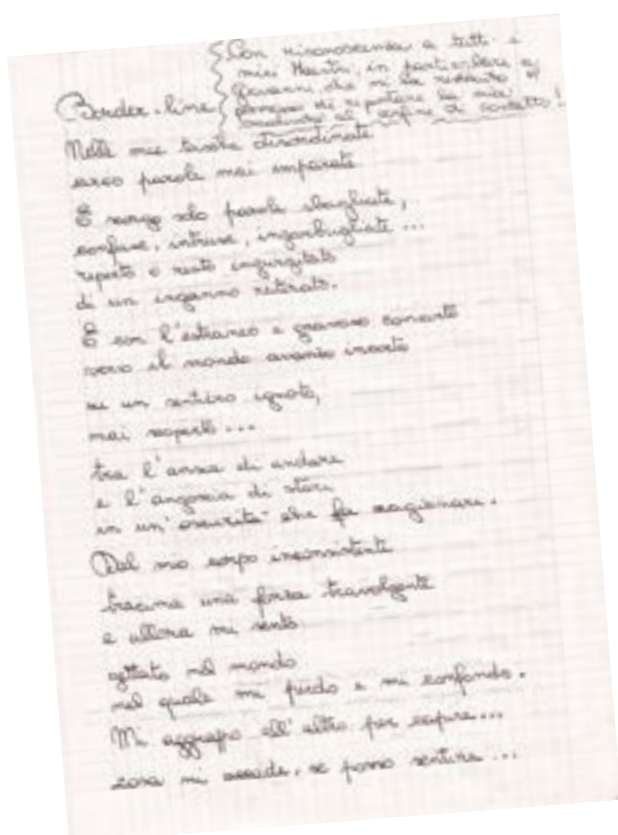
## BORDERLINE

Annalisa Iaculo

As a sign of gratitude to all my Masters, particularly to Giovanni, who reestablished the permission to bring my creativity back to contact boundaries!

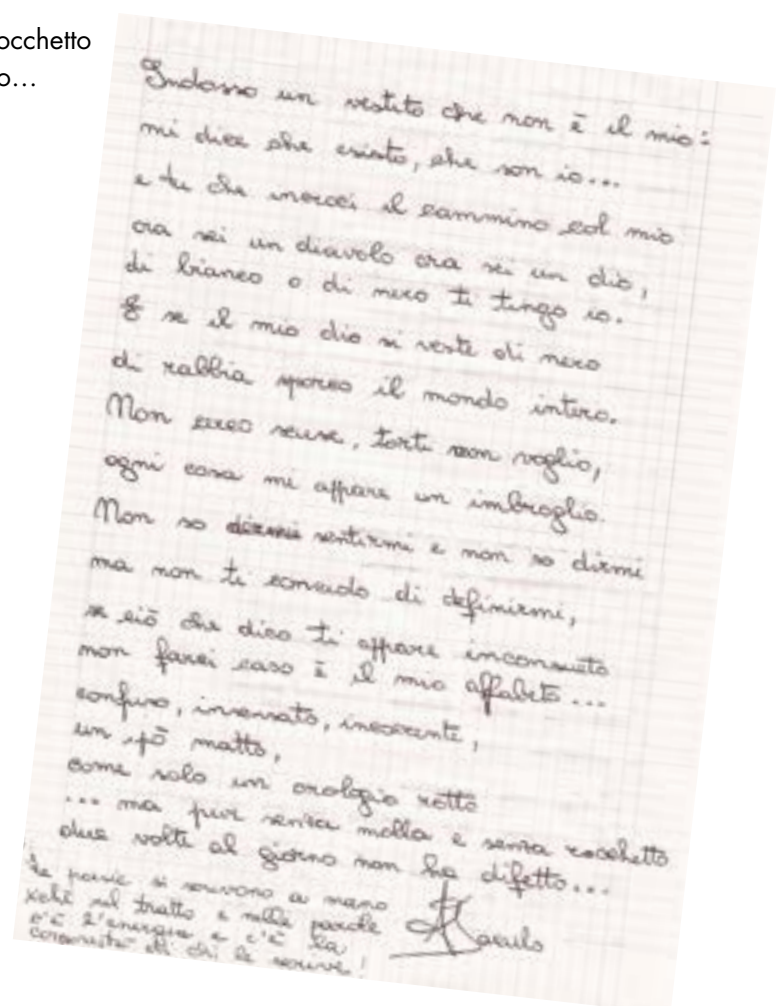
## BORDER-LINE

Nelle mie tasche disordinate  
cerco parole mai imparate  
E scorgo solo parole sbagliate,  
confuse, intrusive, ingarbugliate...  
reperito o resto ingurgitato  
di un inganno reiterato.  
E con l'estraneo e gravoso concerto  
verso il mondo avanzo incerto  
su un sentiero ignoto,  
mai scoperto...  
tra l'ansia di andare  
e l'angoscia di stare  
in un'oscurità che fa sragionare.  
Dal mio corpo inconsistente  
tracima una forza travolgente  
e allora mi sento  
gettato nel mondo  
nel quale mi perdo e mi confondo.  
Mi aggrappo all'altro per capire...  
Cosa mi accade, se posso sentire...  
Indosso un vestito che non è il mio:  
mi dice che esisto, che son io...  
e tu che incroci il cammino col mio  
ora sei un diavolo ora sei un dio,  
di bianco o di nero ti tingo io.





E se il mio dio si veste di nero  
di rabbia sporco il mondo intero.  
Non cerco scuse, torti non voglio,  
ogni cosa mi appare un imbroglio.  
Non so sentirmi e non so dirmi  
ma non ti concedo di definirmi,  
se ciò che dico ti appare inconsueto  
non farci caso è il mio alfabeto...  
confuso, insensato, incoerente,  
un po' matto,  
come solo un orologio rotto  
...ma pur senza molla e senza rocchetto  
due volte al giorno non ha difetto...  
(A. Iaculo)



Indosso un vestito che non è il mio:  
mi dice che esiste, che son io...  
e tu che invece al sammino sei mio  
ora sei un diavolo ora sei un dio,  
di bianco o di nero ti tengo io.  
E se il mio dio si veste di nero  
di rabbia sporco il mondo intero.  
Non cerco scuse, torti non voglio,  
ogni cosa mi appare un imbroglio.  
Non so dirmi sentirmi e non so dirmi  
ma non ti concedo di definirmi,  
se ciò che dico ti appare inconsueto  
non farci caso è il mio alfabeto...  
confuso, insensato, incoerente,  
un po' matto,  
come solo un orologio rotto  
...ma pur senza molla e senza rocchetto  
due volte al giorno non ha difetto...  
le parole si muovono a mano  
che sul tratto è mille parole  
c'è l'energia e c'è la  
corrente di chi le muove!

*A. Iaculo*

PS: Poems need to be handwritten because in the hand's stroke and the words there are the energy and the corporeity of who writes them!

Annalisa,

Thank you for this poem.

It's really moving. It sings your path, your pains, and your haven with precise accuracy and with artistic vibrations.

The words you wrote – in your own hand! – are notes that vibrate in the heart of any lost wanderer trying to find himself... You arrived at your time, your Kairòs: the time of birth and rebirth.

Reading the last words of your poem, I imagined you: You, expert dancer, giving life to the broken clock dance (remember Dalì?)

A broken clock that dances... is the marvel you have experienced and changed. And dancing every hour, every moment (has) become(s) the right one... in the game of uniqueness and sharing.

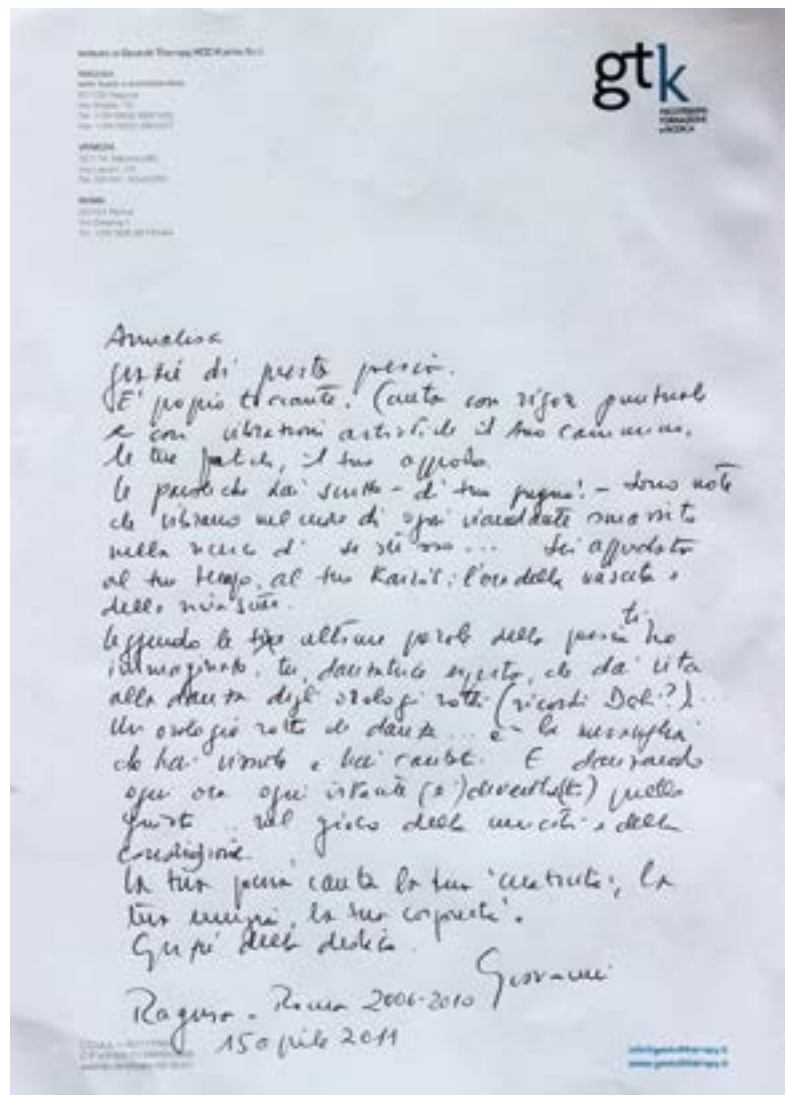
Your poem highlights your creativeness, your energy, your corporeity.

Thank you for the dedication.

Giovanni

Ragusa-Rome 2006-2010

April 15th, 2011







## RE-READING 'THE RE-DISCOVERED BODY'

### Interview with Maurizio Stupiggia

by Elisa Amenta

The method of storing traumatic experience in the memory is different to the way in which we store experiences. The traumatic event becomes 'encapsulated', 'encysted' without being metabolised and appearing dangerous, so the trauma does not become a memory to which mind and sensations go.

**Elisa Amenta.** *I have read your book The Violated Body, a psycho-corporeal approach to the trauma of abuse, and I found it very interesting for clinical practice and studies on abuse, as well as in regards to the recovery of memories of abuse that we have been studying for some years within our scientific community under the guidance of Prof. Giovanni Salonia, director of the Gestalt Therapy Kairos Institute.*

*It is impossible not to admire your accuracy in describing what happens to a person's body who has been subjected to abuse in childhood and your open heartedness in offering treatment techniques acquired through clinical experience.*

*Despite broad literature on the subject, it is difficult to find clinical signs when reconstructing the path of the narrative of forgotten pain.*

*I would like to focus on the issue of the reliability of recovered traumatic memory, on the syndrome of misleading memory and on the therapeutic effect related to the recovery of memories.*

*By referring to neurological studies, you maintain that the method of storing traumatic experience in the memory is different to the way in which we store experiences. The traumatic event becomes 'encapsulated', 'encysted' without being metabolised and appearing dangerous, so the trauma does not become a memory to which mind and sensations go.*

*Can you tell us how this all takes place on a neurological level and what the consequences of these observations are in clinical practice?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** We know that a traumatic situation strongly stimulates Amygdala, the system that evaluates the emotional significance of afferent stimulus, but now we also know that heightened stimulation of the Amygdala damages the functioning of the Hippocampus. One could hypothesise that when something like this happens, the sensory impressions of the

experience are archived in the memory, but, given that the Hippocampus is unable to carry out its integrative functions, these different impressions are not organised as one. The experience is therefore left fragmented, in the form of sounds, smells, physical sensations, flash backs, and is perceived as unrelated and separate from the rest of the experience. Memories of trauma are timeless and unrelated to the ego.

Furthermore, during these moments of enormous intensity, a part of the brain – the Broca area – assigned to the translation of personal experiences in communicable language, interrupts its functioning.

We must conclude that this is reflected in the 'silent terror' demonstrated by these patients and in their tendency to experience emotions in the form of physical conditions rather than verbally codified experiences. These results suggest that patients affected by PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) have difficulty in translating their own sensations into words, which is linked to actual changes in brain activity.

Here is why it is necessary to look at the treatment of these disorders with a view that it may go beyond words and that it allows the main outcast – the body – to attempt to heal a wound that has become a deep crack.

**Elisa Amenta.** *You consider the body as the place of the primary occurrence of the traumatic event, although in traditional therapies the obvious is not always taken into serious consideration.*

*In your opinion, can this give truthfulness to the memory that emerges from the body? Are there, in your opinion, any indicators that tell us that those experiences have truly happened?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** This is a very difficult and complex question. For now we say that, from a phenomenological point of view, what emerges brings with it a sign of truth. But we also know that a complete memory presents itself only when Amygdala, hippocampus and cortices close the circuit, when in other words body and mind integrate reciprocally. Therefore we can say that only clear and stable mental content can provide a possible element of truth to a bodily emergence. At the same time, in many cases, we can say that mental content can

This is reflected in the 'silent terror' demonstrated by these patients and in their tendency to experience emotions in the form of physical conditions rather than verbally codified experiences.

From a phenomenological point of view, what emerges brings with it a sign of truth.

only provide plausibility – and not certainty! – to the emerging memory. However, returning to the matter of the body's heuristic importance, my clinical experience brings me to report that often patients show recurrent and recognisable frames of mind and bodily reactions to certain stimulants or to particular atmospheres. These are, in my opinion, indicators of deep, experiential content buried in the individual that warn us that something not-yet-elaborated is lingering underneath.

**Elisa Amenta.** *You maintain that the 'encysted'/'incorporated' memory in a sort of bodily memory re-emerges in an anarchic way also through simple, sensory stimuli.*

*Can you tell us something more about the onset of the memory 'in an anarchic way'? In what way can such a phenomenon be connected to the person's path of awareness?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** I have shown on many occasions that the traumatic memory follows a specific sensory and motor register, and it does not always have a connection to the logic of the mental content.

Its onset is therefore senseless and is linked to those sensory details that we understand only *post festum*. The same concept of awareness is involved and expanded upon, because it is not only limited to perceptions (however deep!) but it also includes the bodily experience in itself, which at times is not fully describable through words. I would also say that this practice has forced me to add a new definition to the traditional concept of *State of consciousness*: *State of being*.

**Elisa Amenta.** *In the description of the clinical treatment, you refer to the rules of body-to-body communication and to the methods of intervention. They create a secure framework, such that permits the therapist to come into contact with the patient's deep nucleus without making him feel violated.*

*What, in your experience, self regulates this interpersonal communication between patient and therapist?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** The therapist needs to think that in cases of trauma the situation changes radically. It requires much more subtle attention to the processes of exchange and interaction.

The patient can have various construction deficits of the relationship and therefore expose the therapist to unexpected surprises: abrupt changes of humour, micro relationship breaks, a sudden retreat from the emotional state, indirect attacks to himself or others etc. It needs to follow the idea that the patient must have a certain skill of processes, not feel threatened or overwhelmed, and not ever sense that the therapist may be operating internal strategies. Everything must be variable, created together and clear. The therapist must also be very careful to not abruptly or excessively change individual or relational arousal, in order to avoid the past trauma being brought back to life.

**Elisa Amenta.** *I find it interesting that you refer to some methods of practice and in particular to the use of the 'gesto-chiave' technique as 'a door to the memory'. The individualisation of the 'gesto-chiave' to which you refer in your clinical treatment evokes the interrupted story of the body and completes its plot, searching for a different ending from that already written. In range of the bodily psychotherapies, with the emphasis on 'gesto-chiave' it reconnects the muscular-emotional sequence: a withheld emotion that tends to be drawn out. Gestalt Therapy, within a relational prospective, signifies the muscular-emotional blockage, like a precise, failed gesture inside a precise relationship. Do you consider a relational prospective possible, as well as an intrapsychic one of this sequence?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** Certainly! In one of my recent articles I showed the importance of the 'gesto-chiave' technique in the practice of re-binding the implicit, relational plot. This is useful in the cases of traumatised people, because it rebuilds a sense of being-with-another. I would also like to underline the fact that, for me, and from my bio- systematic point of view, any individual aspect has a relational significance; my body is the fruit of relational history and, at the same time, literally produces the same actual interactions as an echo of the past.

**Elisa Amenta.** *For us Gestalt Psychotherapists, the phenomenological analysis of the body-in-relation and of the relational plots that a person builds in life and in the therapeutic setting allows us to learn, inside and through the relationship,*

In range of the bodily psychotherapies, with the emphasis on 'gesto-chiave' it reconnects the muscular-emotional sequence: a withheld emotion that tends to be drawn out. Gestalt Therapy, within a relational prospective, signifies the muscular-emotional blockage, like a precise, failed gesture inside a precise relationship.

*the ways in which they interrupt each other, on a verbal and bodily level, and the routes that they take from us towards another and from another towards us.*

*What are you referring to when you speak of the phenomenological observation of the body as a mode of knowledge?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** Two things. The first concerns our way of elaborating the events with the body, on a senso-motorial level. This aspect is evident in babies, but it is always present in our lives and it allows us to tune in to one another, to be familiar with it from an implicit, interactive point of view.

The other, from a clinical perspective, is the ability to observe the patient's rapid and microscopic reactions within the therapeutic relationship: they are the micro practises which George Downing talks about, that build the implicit structure of our relational history.

**Elisa Amenta.** *For people who have been subjected to sexual abuse in childhood, 'to forget' is often the best solution, considering the resources available.*

*What makes it possible to remember the traumatic experience after years of amnesia?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** There are various reasons and conditions for which the person can start to remember traumatic events:

- An event/stimulus that may have a senso-motorial connection with the trauma;
- A major, psychic integration of the subject;
- A secure, environmental climate;
- A new lifestyle which requires the person to take a developmental step forward.

These are the ones that I have observed more frequently.

**Elisa Amenta.** *When the abused person is able to recreate his autobiographical narrative, do you think it is appropriate to encourage him to compare himself to the abuser? Does the comparison facilitate the healing or does it create more discomfort?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** I do not believe it is useful to encourage such comparison. Most of the 'living comparisons' in this type of situation generate enormous pain and at times a regression

There are various reasons and conditions for which the person can start to remember traumatic events:

- An event/stimulus that may have a senso-motorial connection with the trauma;
- A major, psychic integration of the subject;
- A secure, environmental climate;
- A new lifestyle which requires the person to take a developmental step forward.



in the healing process. This is not definite, but it is my personal, clinical experience. Obviously I have seen some exceptions to this but they were connected to particular conditions of the abuser: a radical change of life, a disabling illness or a potentially fatal illness... At the same time, I am not trying to discourage people from making comparisons but I show everyone the risks associated with them.

**Elisa Amenta.** *If a memory of abuse is not truly recoverable and not for the will of the abused person, which hypotheses do you use from a diagnostic perspective and how would you say this is useful when proceeding in reference to the path of healing?*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** There are some memories that are so old and dramatic that they cannot be recovered. In these cases I work by occupying myself mainly with the operation of the person in the present, trying to help him to modify his emotional self-regulation. I often use references to a traumatic past but not to its content. I work, in other words, by showing the patient all the present recurring events of the experiential characteristics of the trauma. Often we try to build a 'near-memory' together; we outline, in other words, a possible scenario of events that may give a sense of unfamiliarity to the present. This is necessary to close the circle of 'corticality' which suppresses anxiety and arousal. This clinical strategy is very useful in giving stability to the person, but it also carries the risk of evoking false memories: it is a technique to be used with much caution.

**Elisa Amenta.** *Have you had the opportunity to see the drawings and to read Eva Aster's poetry published in Issue 2 of the GTK Journal of Psychotherapy? They describe fragments of a patient's therapeutic journey and memory of abuse.*

**Maurizio Stupiggia.** I find the material of Eva Aster very touching, both in the words and in the images that she uses. It is a short journey, in her writing, but surely a long one in her existential journey and that defines her final achievement well: the wholeness of love. I believe that this summarises perfectly what people who have experienced such things are inclined to be like; it is the thing that has been taken away from them and

The joy is enormous when Eva discovers she is whole and almost does not believe it because she thinks it is a miracle; but one can surrender to the evidence of Giovanni's look that says only one word – «Beautiful» – but it is a word that instantaneously pieces together all the pieces and gives it a happy ending!

it is therefore the thing that works mainly in the depths of their soul. However, this is not always in light of their conscience, given that often we cannot know what is missing, if it has been ripped away from us prematurely or with deceit or violence. This type of existential theft, in fact, has a terrible characteristic: it also devastates the most intimate place of personal identity.

Eva Aster accompanies us here on a short journey of possible healing of the wound caused by violence and shows a typical characteristic of this type of injury: the experience of loss, of mutilation, which is brutally clear in these images.

This is one of three fundamental bodily experiences that can be verified during abuse: incorporation, loss (or mutilation), and distortion. Obviously every type of experience mixes itself with the other two, but often it stores a predominant characteristic. Here we see that broken leg or sutured body... all paths of progressive discovery of the pain that attacks the body and transfigures it. As a consequence, the joy is enormous when Eva discovers she is whole and almost does not believe it because she thinks it is a miracle; but one can surrender to the evidence of Giovanni's look that says only one word – «Beautiful» – but it is a word that instantaneously pieces together all the pieces and gives it a happy ending!



## THE FLIGHT OF BAUMAN IN SIRACUSA

### Interview with Zygmunt Bauman

by Orazio Mezzio (\*)

Researchers of social sciences are talking of a time in which man is more and more alone; at best, an era in which he himself, instead of feeling comforted by the urgent flow of events that involve him, exhibits phobias barely contextualised with the schemes.

*The inhabitants of the Earth have never been so close. They are linked by more and more urgent events in space and, especially, in time. The production and distribution of goods and services has no limits and the system of communication transmits instantaneous information. Every organism is involved, in different ways, in this unimaginable whirlwind of innovations that (not only taking into account Information Technology) we could define a 'virtual revolution'.*

*Therefore, we are seeing silent as much as overwhelming changes between people and their institutions.*

*It seems bizarre but researchers of social sciences are talking of a time in which man is more and more alone; at best, an era in which he himself, instead of feeling comforted by the urgent flow of events that involve him, exhibits phobias barely contextualised with the schemes.*

*Phenomena of new marginalisation and widespread poverty add to striking mass demonstrations and waste raw materials (groceries as much as minerals).*

*Why is this happening? How can it be happening? What are the challenges of the present that will prevent us from losing humanity to the clouds on the horizon?*

*Zygmunt Bauman, who is amongst the most read and quoted authors on the subject, proposes an original explanation. On the strength of his several-decade-long in-depth analyses (he is Polish and of Jewish origin, and professor emeritus at the English University of Leeds) and rich of his 87 years of age, he uses the metaphor of water to describe modernity: «Ours is a liquid society – he wrote – where man is no longer an oak tree with thick roots, but a ship that roams from port to port».*

(\*) For the translation into Italian, our thanks go to Prof. Sebastiano Russo.

*The researcher – although he points out that he is not capable of making prophecies – in his recent magistralis lecture held in Siracusa, he nevertheless wanted to encourage the young generations to respond to the drifting away of the world as it currently seems. The history of the city – formerly territory of Corinto, then principal city of Magna Grecia, capital of the holy roman empire and now provincial capital (Italian) – will have inspired the decisive reaction of the famous hosts in showing scenes of globalisation: «Sustainability (compared to usable resources on the planet for guaranteeing everyone equal opportunities of growth) and integration (with diversity that is considered a resource) are the ways in which I think you should focus your attention» – he said passionately to the attentive audience. His observations are the result of a way of thinking that originates from afar, which the same Bauman, during his stay in Aretusa, introduced us to in the in-depth, exclusive interview that he gave to the readers of GTK.*

«Ours is a liquid society – he wrote – where man is no longer an oak tree with thick roots, but a ship that roams from port to port».

**An abnormal financial crisis is upsetting the western system. The Nation States seem powerless in guaranteeing the stability of the markets and nobody seems to be able to explain the objective towards which we are moving. And yet one time common stocks served to finance the mines for the acquisition of raw materials. It then passed to the shares to build mechanical and chemical industries. Today, on the other hand, one talks of financial speculation regarding virtual stocks whose owners are unknown. Where is man in this evanescent society, governed by systems without a name, and without neither face nor homeland? Are we heading towards the crossing of the same liquid society?**

I fully agree when one says that nations seem unable to guarantee the stability of the markets. On the other hand, I do not agree when one speaks of the markets' objective, presuming that is, they have any objectives. Effectively, if it appears to us that the markets are fixing the objectives, this is a responsibility to attribute to the powerlessness of the same nations, which do not know how to explain the causes of what happens.

In what I define as the modern 'solid' period, the hope was that power and politics were united, that they would live in close matrimony. However, in our period, they are in a state of separation or even divorce.

The true power – which decides what is possible and what is impossible to do in our situation – is beyond the ability of any national government.

Power is already global, whilst politics has remained local – almost like 100 years ago.

The markets are shifting, centred on themselves and hence they are not a coordinated and predestined institution there to set any objectives. They know where they come from, but they do not know where they are going. The point then is this: to catch the characteristic aspect defining every focused action; to know, in other words, where it is going, not simply to what it is responding; to appreciate what is the goal, the objective of your movement. The markets are unable to do this. This is the fundamental reason for the turmoil in which the human condition currently finds itself.

It is not really a psychological fault of the governments' ministers, but rather a structural defect of the way in which society is organised today. The fundamental cause of this collapse is what I call the separation between power and politics. Power means the ability to do things, whilst politics is the ability to decide which things need to be done.

Now, these two things – power and politics – are both important to each other so as to have an efficient order.

Historically, in what I define as the modern 'solid' period, the hope was that power and politics were united, that they would live in close matrimony. However, in our period, they are in a state of separation or even divorce, which means that on one side we have power that is not controlled by politics and, on the other side, politics that is deprived of power: power is necessary to organise, decide and impose political decisions and this last one is necessary to decide which objectives, which discoveries should be pursued.

Thus there is a discrepancy in the result between the means of the action and the magnitude of the tasks that the action must force to put these into place. The true power – which decides what is possible and what is impossible to do in our situation – is beyond the ability of any national government. Not just the Italian government, but even that of the United States of America is not effectively in a position to control the direction of this movement.

To sum up, the power is already global, whilst politics has remained local – almost like 100 years ago.

It is the edge of the State-Nation: you cannot go further, you cannot chase the power that is on the run because you will not catch it, it is beyond your reach. It is not an obvious matter, not



even for the heads of the most powerful European states. They will reunite one Friday to discuss what to do, how to respond to the crisis that is hitting Italy, Spain, Portugal and I do not know who next. That day they will spend a sleepless night, then Saturday, Sunday... waiting for Monday, when the stock markets will open. Then, we will know if they have acted for better or worse. As I am addressing the readers of GTK, I will reveal which psychological effect implies living in such conditions.

You do not know anymore – if you are a common citizen like you or I – what you can count on, what you can invest your hopes in and your expectations on. That of contemporary society is simply a form of fluctuating trust, in search of a port to throw oneself off of, but not finding it. The big question today, as a result of the separation of which we have spoken about, is not ‘what’ we should do but ‘who’ should do it. Even if you know what needs to be done, there is no institution in charge that can do it.

To summarise, I think that the more it is mentioned in the wording of the question – the financial crisis, the credit crisis, every type of crisis – they are all manifestations of one significant crisis that I believe is the ‘agency crisis’: there is no institution able to promote and implement an adequate solution. In the absence of a reliable agency, capable to do the necessary, the only certainty that we have is uncertainty. The only certain thing about our condition is that in the foreseeable future we will remain in conditions of uncertainty. The uncertainty can be divided into two parts. The first regards the unpredictability of the events, for example, finance: we do not know what will happen in the markets, it is absolutely impossible to predict it. The other aspect regards powerlessness. Powerlessness can mean that you can also know which catastrophe is coming, but you also know that you cannot do anything to prevent it.

**An uncertain man roams the globalised world between unpredictability and powerlessness. In the context of ethical relativism that is advancing, there is who – like Benedict XVI – sees the core of the western crisis in the resignation of the man in face of the truth. Is there room for absolute virtues in the liquid society? Is it possible to link concepts such as freedom, justice and democracy?**

You do not know anymore – if you are a common citizen like you or I – what you can count on, what you can invest your hopes in and your expectations on.

The big question today is not ‘what’ we should do but ‘who’ should do it.

There is no institution able to promote and implement an adequate solution. In the absence of a reliable agency, capable to do the necessary, the only certainty that we have is uncertainty.

Freedom, justice and democracy are essentially absolute virtues. Evident in governments and the political forces that strive to take the government worldwide, they pretend to be attached to them. However, the issue is not so much if there is room for absolute virtues. Everyone by now agrees that a lack of freedom is a bad thing, injustice is a horrible thing, and to be against democracy is something incredibly repugnant. Why, therefore, is it so difficult to discover what is behind these virtues?

On this point, however, we are much divided and not because we do not believe in these values (on the contrary, in effect we maintain that it would be very nice to have a world like that). Naturally, many of us have our own personal ideas on how a fair world should be, but many, in any case, accept these slogan virtues. What we do not have is the idea of a kind society: we do not think about it, we are incapable of describing it, not even by saying how it would be, exactly as a result of the 'agency crisis' of which I spoke previously.

When I was young, people argued exactly about what people argue about today: about what needed to be done, about how to improve society, about how to get rid of every kind of flaw, about things that cause worry, and so on. Nevertheless – I remember it well – they never argued about the question. I mean that they didn't question themselves: who needs to do that? Because already they knew that the States Nation was there to do it. Everyone believed in the States Nation, it didn't matter whether they were left or right. Everyone knew (or they assumed) that once the government was established, it would have done the necessary: at that time, we had power and politics, in other words, everything that was required.

Nowadays, it is no longer like that. Why waste time thinking about a kind society? It is simply a kind of magic and not a place for rational things. In 'solid' modern times many were committed to writing the proposal of utopian places, where all of contemporary society's troubles would have disappeared and where each one would have had its own place or would have been satisfied with it. There is not anything that corresponds to these utopias in the present day. Yes, because then there was the belief that it was possible to unravel the idea of freedom, justice, democracy and so on. There was, in addi-

tion, another belief, that once this was achieved there would never have been any difficulty in effectively putting everything in its proper place: the State Nation would have done it.

Therefore, our society – I'm talking about our grandparents and great-grandparents – was organised in a way that it was a factory of solidarity, condensation, closeness, stabilisation of common principles, values, ideas possessed by the people and that were put back into in the centre of collective, unified action.

Our society today, on the other hand, is a factory of competitive relationships rather than of solidarity; a factory of anti-solidarity, that is destroying social solidarity and obstructing the stabilisation of genuine political forces.

In the eyes of the history of Utopia, social scenarios can be divided into three different categories.

The first is the pre-modern scenario, so to speak, just like the medieval scenario. A social genre, in which the prevailing attitude to humanity was to believe that God created reality and that he made the world. Everything that he produced is in its place and our task as men is to keep everything untouched, which we have received as a gift from God. So, there was no room for Utopia in society back then with this kind of meaning. It was a thousand-year old way of thinking. The only thing that we imagined could change the situation was the Second Coming or the Apocalypse. In neither of the two can we do anything, we cannot alter the stream of things on which we have no possibility to act.

Things are changing in the modern era, in which the prevailing attitude is no longer the attitude of the watchman who simply defends the legacy of humanity from the intruders, but the attitude of the gardener. If you have a garden, you know how to plan perfect harmony. Without his commitment and hard daily effort, the gardener also believes that there will be no garden. The weeds will grow over. In this the utopias lay. Utopia was the vision of a garden without weeds. Nothing was too much, everything that was there was in its rightful place, and so on. Nevertheless, today, in liquid modernity, a deregulated, privatised utopia is a utopia of hunters and not of gardeners. The idea of a deregulated gardener is a stupid idea, it is not credible, and it is not conceivable. You cannot deregulate a garden because it would mean to destroy it. But our utopia today – if

Our society today is a factory of competitive relationships rather than of solidarity; a factory of anti-solidarity, that is destroying social solidarity and obstructing the stabilisation of genuine political forces.

Today, in liquid modernity, a deregulated, privatised utopia is a utopia of hunters and not of gardeners.

ever we were to have a utopia – is a utopia of hunters, that is not the wish to create a better society than what there is now, but to carve out for themselves a very comfortable space in an essentially uncomfortable world. The hunters aim to kill the most game possible: they do not worry about the harmony of the forest.

So this is the type of prevailing utopia in our mind today, constantly inoculated through the media, the TV, the newspapers and blogs, Facebook and similar. It is a pressure that creates a kind of factory of individualism.

**So, innovations such as those supported by Steve Jobs – with his testament to youngsters «You may be starving, you may be crazy» and his computing suggestions that have offered products to the market before the consumer requirement was even born – can they be considered prophecies of a liquid society or the creation of virtual instruments? Or are they only the means with which the inhabitants of the liquid society seek shelter from their fears?**

A solution to socially produced problems cannot be handed out individually.

Steve Jobs has been the Prophet of this kind of ideology that says that we must find solutions in an individual way (you or you or you or I... whatever that may be, individual means talent and personal abilities and resources that we personally possess) to problems produced socially or also globally. And this is – naturally – impossible, because a solution to socially produced problems cannot be handed out individually.

It dawns on me – perhaps those much younger than me remember – that once upon a time there was a phobia of nuclear war that threatened to destroy the world. What was the advice given to the citizens? To buy yourself a fallout shelter for your own family! And this is exactly what today's hunters of the utopias recommend.

Having said that, if we tackle the last part of the question it means we need to go to the other side of our actual possibility of response. It requires the introduction of many and different arguments in order to present the problem of our being today, in a world divided in half between the online and the offline and of the link between the online and the offline: in particu-





larly the world in which we live and in which our children, my nieces and nephews, your children, spend the large part of time online rather than offline. For this reason, the basic information regarding living comes from there: how does it differentiate this world from the offline world? And the second important issue is: the things that we learn online and that we come to love and wish for, are they transferable from there? Can they also be used offline?

Concerning this research, I think I am perhaps too old to solve the issue that it poses. In any case, I believe it is too early to be able to respond to these two questions on the division between online and offline. All the responses given to date are premature. It is just missing experience and then it is comprehensible, given that everything only happened twenty years ago. Now there is a new generation that has never experienced a world without internet and the older generations, within twenty years, will be forgotten in the same way in which we have forgotten the world before Gutenberg, inventor of printing.

### **Men alone in an ever wide world.**

**How much do the fears of a liquid society represent an absence of horizons and how much do they instead manifest egoism for the risk of losing or sharing the wellbeing accumulated until now?**

Why does it happen that fear is present in whatever historic society and in whatever imaginable society? Because we are the only living species aware of being mortal.

I think that every period in history may have had its own fears, at least these type of fears. People during the day were joyous, they enjoyed themselves, but at night they had nightmares.

Why does it happen that fear is present in whatever historic society and in whatever imaginable society? Because – and this is particularly important to the readers of a Journal such as GTK – we are the only living species aware of being mortal.

Animals know, at times even better than us, that death is approaching, but they do not know from birth and throughout their lives that they are mortal, that they must die. Only we humans know it and so we have a fear of death that creates an absurd concentration on life itself.

As we can read into the meditations of Blaise Pascal, he explains why the knowledge that everyone will one day finish making absurd and senseless our being in this world.



My experience, after over sixty years of studying culture, is that the whole idea of this culture is also a specific trait of the human species. No other species possesses an equivalent of the human culture. Culture is a device that makes life conceivable with the knowledge of mortality.

But culture also offers us some gadgets that allow us to coexist day after day with the knowledge of death. These gadgets are associated with the idea of virtues, of the finality that we go in search of. We are enthusiastic about it, fascinated: we have an objective to reach and whilst we chase the fulfilment of these virtues, of these discoveries, we simply do not have time to think about the end.

However, the specific fears of the liquid society are once again linked to other aspects of the liquid society.

In the past, cultural products conveyed the culture that generated them; in other words, when our ancestors imagined their history as an evolution from the lowest point to the highest point, to another even higher: there was one line, one lineal evolution of culture.

But today, unlike that time, the cultural advice, the cultural recommendation, the cultural pressure that we happen to experience are all deregulated. So, gadgets that allow us to coexist with this primordial fear are scattered, spread and differentiated. As a consequence, our fears are once again diffused, scattered and without an anchor. We are scared, we have nightmares but we do not know exactly why we are scared, what the reason is for this fear. Fear fluctuates again: as we have said before, it is in search of a place to cling to.

Now I am about to say something heretical. We all know that we are living, tripping from one crisis to another. What I mean is that we end up confronting one crisis and already another one looms. However, in this, there is nothing heretical, because whoever reads the newspapers or watches the television knows it. What is heretical, however, is what I am about to say.

My opinion regarding the crises is that they are not just 'something that happens' – in reality, we need them. We, something that I wouldn't normally say in public, would feel quite uncomfortable without a crisis. Yes, if we do not have anything to worry ourselves about, we do not know what to do. We

Culture is a device that makes life conceivable with the knowledge of mortality.

Fear is in search of a place to cling to.

If we do not have anything to worry ourselves about, we do not know what to do.

The fears remain; they become a new target, for this reason we will go from one target of fears to another one, unless we do not face the problems that are hiding behind us.

want to link things to a place, because when in some way we confront our fears, we believe we are able to do something. There are people – for example, the Lega in Italy – that say if the Padania were created and separated from the rest of Italy (and Sicily is completely excluded from Italy), then we would all be happy and the fear would disappear from everything. However, not far, twenty miles from Palermo, Lampedusa Island is crowded by refugees from North Africa: they would then have a new crisis; then terrorists and bombs somewhere... and another crisis, something crumbles and there you are, another crisis. Every time, in every instant we know what to fear, and that is of great psychological comfort.

If you agree with much of what I have said, we find ourselves in a big and unpleasant state of chaos, because no reaction to one or all of these true or alleged crises solves the problem of being scared. The fears remain; they become a new target, for this reason we will go from one target of fears to another one, unless we do not face the problems that are hiding behind us. Medicine is a type of activity directly correlated to this essential primordial fear of mortality. Doctors, when they write death certificates, never write in the certificates all the causes of death, they never write «died of mortality», no, never! They simply write: «of kidneys», «of the liver», «of the lungs». There are thousands of causes of death: you eliminate one of them and another nine hundred and ninety nine remain! Then you eliminate another, then another, then another: in the end you become immortal yourself!



### M. V. Miller (2008), REVIEW OF TEACHING A PARANOID TO FLIRT: THE POETICS OF GESTALT THERAPY

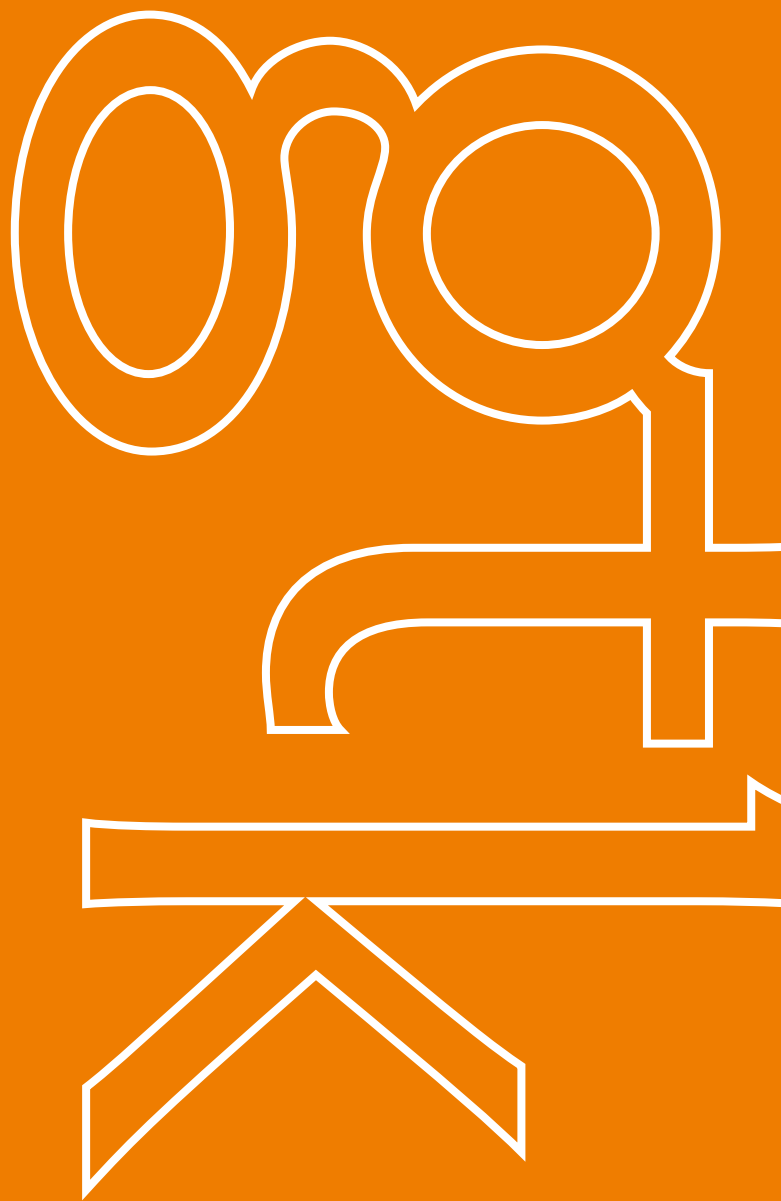
Michael Vincent Miller describes the fundamental Gestalt Therapy perspective in its very nature as well as in its activity, that resemble the making of expressive works and forms of art and the philosophical investigation and critical reflection. In other words, the aim of the book is to explore how Gestalt Therapy teaches a right of way of behaving and communicating to its patients.

The book is divided into three different parts: 1) Themes: Clinical and Philosophical; 2) Commentary and 3) Founders and Shapers: Introductions and Elegies. Specifically, in the chapter *Notes on Art and Symptoms* (part I), the author describes how both art and psychotherapy are above supposed to put us in touch our feelings: «the healthy or good life has the character of good art, a shaping experience into vital representations that are fluid and resilient enough to keep up with the present circumstances. I thought of this as something like the poet Ezra Pound's definition of poetry as news that stay news» (p.11). From the title chapter *Teaching a Paranoid to Flirt* to *The Aesthetics of Commitment: What Gestalt Therapists Can Learn from Cézanne and Miles Davis*, the author explores the facets of Gestalt Therapy: the aesthetic, the theoretical as well as the clinical. In part II, he describes a *Reflection on Cornell*, as the aesthetics of sexual love and a book review on *Presenting the present*, based on Daniel Stern's book *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (New York.: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

He underlines in particular how Stern has written a book that is a variant of the theory of Gestalt Therapy, in which the present moment is a basis of health: «the methods of Gestalt Therapy aim to help patients live more fully in the present tense, making more possible spontaneous self-expression and meeting if needs in touch with an actual word» (p. 296). The part III presents an introduction to the Gestalt Journal edition of Gestalt Therapy Press, in which Miller puts together some Isadore From's writings and some long conversations they had during

his illness and its treatment. The poetics of theory is dedicated to Paul Goodman's writings, in which his poetry is the mode of speech that fuses ideas with personal revelation of feeling, never far from the act of making poems. The introduction to Gestalt Therapy verbatim, a Perls' series of live performances in the late 1960's at the Esalen Institute, made up almost entirely of transcribed tapes from Perls' late workshops and seminars. The preface to *S'apparaître A L'occasion D'un Autre* by Jean Marie Robine underlines his sensibility that moves from the philosopher's absorption in the task of fine-tuning concepts to the clinician's fascination with the nuances of feelings and behaviour. Finally, the *Elegy for Laura* and *To the Memory of Miriam Polster* are dedicated to the two central women gestalt therapists who contributed greatly to the formulation of Gestalt Therapy: Laura Perls who broadened its context to include art, culture and philosophy and who taught and practiced it with simplicity as well as with precision and Miriam Polster who was a genuine diva, with a touch of *prima donna*, among teachers of psychotherapy with a natural aristocrat style. However, the book is not intended as a comprehensive handbook of Gestalt Therapy, but rather than as a collection of numerous articles and chapters on it, with its related matters and figures, that offers an overview and a personal point to explore numerous areas of Gestalt Therapy. These issues are explored in the book through epistemological and therapeutic horizons, in which Gestalt Therapy is recognized as a poetics.

*Aluette Merenda*





## WORKS

Cover: Marika Vicari from the series "Questo viaggio è una storia", 2011. 30x20 cm, graphite on poplar wood veneer.

Pag. 4-5: Marika Vicari from the series "In quel bosco nero presto fioriranno in bucanave", 2009. 20x30 cm, graphite and pastels on wood.

Pag. 6: Marika Vicari from the series "Questo viaggio è una storia", 2011. 30x20 cm, graphite on poplar wood veneer.

Pag. 8: Marika Vicari, "Attesa", installation view, Castello di Landeck, 2010 photo courtesy the artist.

Pag. 12: Marika Vicari from the series "Questo viaggio è una storia", 2011. 30x20 cm, graphite on poplar wood veneer.

Pag. 16: Marika Vicari, "Storie d'alberi, foglie e passi", triptych, graphite and pastels on wood, 2011. Installation view Kro Art Contemporary, Vienna 2012, photo courtesy the artist, private collection.

Pag. 28: Marika Vicari Installation view "As I walk", MT55 Vicenza, 2010, photo courtesy Marika Vicari.

Pag. 38: Marika Vicari, "Viscum", installation view, Schloss Landeck, 2010 photo courtesy Marika Vicari.

Pag. 46: Marika Vicari "Il tempo degli alberi", installation view, Galleria l'Occhio, Venezia, 2008, photo courtesy the artist.

Pag. 58-59: Marika Vicari from the series "In quel bosco nero presto fioriranno in bucanave", 2009. 20x30cm, graphite and pastels on wood.

Pag. 60: Marika Vicari, detail of the installation "Il vento continua a soffiare e a rug-gire nel bosco", Gallery Punto sull'arte, Varese 2011, photo courtesy Alberto Bortoluzzi.

Pag. 64: Marika Vicari, installation of the series "As I walk", Galleria l'occhio, Venezia, 2011- 2012.

Pag. 72: Marika Vicari "As I walk", installation view, Galleria l'Occhio, Venezia, 2011 photo courtesy the artist.

Pag. 80: Marika Vicari from the series "Questo viaggio è una storia", 2011 30x20 cm, graphite on poplar wood veneer.

Pag. 84: Marika Vicari, "The third Landscape", installation view, Galleria Punto sull'arte, Varese, 2012, photo courtesy Alberto Bortoluzzi.



