## contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ABOUT THE JOURNAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>EDITOR’S LETTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>BEING IN THE FIELD</td>
<td>Deirdre Foley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A TEAM COACH ABOUT TO GO ROG</td>
<td>Thomas Ameel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>LUNCH AS A SMALL GESTALT SESSION</td>
<td>Tomi Rozman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>SHAME: APPROACHING THIS CRIPPLING EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC LENS OF GESTALT</td>
<td>Katerina Papathanasiou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ján Ballx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>NEKRASOTA (UNBEAUTY)</td>
<td>Olena Zozulya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>PUSHING BACK AT THE CONTACT BOUNDARY</td>
<td>Dawn Gwilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>UKAGP CONFERENCE REPORT</td>
<td>Dawn Gwilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>RESEARCH BURSARY AWARD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>PROBLEM PAGE</td>
<td>Dr Fake Pearls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>FINANCIAL SUPPORT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>EVENTS AND NOTICES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
about the journal

*New Gestalt Voices* is a platform to support those who have not published before, and others, to share their creativity in relation to gestalt therapy, coaching and organisational practice.

This twice-yearly international journal is published in PDF format, and is free to download from our website. In addition, we publish short-form articles and opinion pieces on our blog, as well as images and audio-visual material.

We invite a range of expression, including poems, stories, drama, journaling, fantasy, dialogue, controversy, debate, videos, photographs, drawings and other artwork, as well as responses to previously published articles.

Contributions are welcome from trainees, recently qualified or experienced therapists, coaches or organisational practitioners, PhDs, non-academics and enthusiasts alike.

If you’re wondering whether you can write for NGV, or contribute in another way, the answer is very probably, yes – so if you have any interest in sharing your creative energy please get in touch!

---

**PUBLISHER:** New Gestalt Voices Ltd  
**REGISTERED OFFICE:** Flat 5, 24 Bemerton Street, London, N1 0BT, United Kingdom

**FOUNDER:** John Gillespie  
john@newgestaltvoices.org

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:** Dawn Gwilt  
dawn@newgestaltvoices.org

**PRODUCTION EDITOR:** Sally Taylor  
sally@newgestaltvoices.org

**WEBSITE:** www.newgestaltvoices.org

**FACEBOOK:** www.facebook.com/newgestaltvoices

*New Gestalt Voices Ltd is a not-for-profit organisation, limited by guarantee, company number 11447162. It is an independent publisher and does not officially endorse any products or services or organisations advertised or otherwise featured in this publication or on its website. All text and images and design contained herein are subject to copyright.*
editor’s letter

For me, this journal is something quite simple and quite special. When I was writing an article for the first edition last July, I was treated with respect and sensitivity that I hadn’t experienced before. I felt truly supported to develop my voice. This was new for me – writing as a process of dialogue. John Gillespie’s gift, as the editor-in-chief, was to communicate real permission for me to be me.

So when John asked me in March to take over the editorship, I had no hesitation in saying yes. I wanted other writers to experience the same care and sensitivity I had received, as well as offering robust challenge and encouragement to grow where appropriate. Perhaps I underestimated the size of the task of editing, which is huge, involving many, many hours! But for the most part it has been delightful and rewarding, and I’ve loved the open dialogue with each writer – each with their own voice, and each willing to show up, share and discuss.

In my first editorial, I wanted to show up with confidence and authority, stating my brand, what I’m good at, what I have to offer, and what my vision is. You know what? I froze and clammed up under the weight of that expectation. So I let it go. In its wake comes this thought: I will learn about this and find my way forward in relationship. I see this as the ethos of the journal – writing, sharing and expressing ideas through relationship. There is a lot of support, every step of the way, demonstrating that writing doesn’t have to be lonely, or a shaming experience. And perhaps this can be true of editing as well.

I feel a bit naked, coming before you as the new editor with no explicit experience. Interesting how the act of acknowledging this puts me in touch with what I am bringing to the table: respect for what is small and subtle and newly forming, for what is vulnerable, and needs to come forward in its own way and in its own time. In essence, that is the reason I have willingly taken on the challenge.

Meanwhile, the NGV community continues to grow and to expand in new directions. Our sister journal New Gestalt Voices in Greece was launched in April this year. I hear from the Greek team, Deirdre Foley, Irini Koutela, and Evangelia Kyriakou, that there’s a real buzz of enthusiasm around the whole initiative, and they’re very excited to be publishing their first edition in December. Here in the UK, enquiries come through the website from all over the world, with people wanting to get involved and participate in different ways. We started a writing support group this year, and the Facebook group continues to be a place for lively discussion and debate, sharing writing for feedback, and airing views.

Before introducing the contents of this issue...
of the journal, I'd like to express appreciation to everyone involved in producing it. As always, massive thanks go to Sally Taylor for pulling it all together to create a beautifully presented third edition, aided by her son, Trey. Many thanks also to those involved with editing the articles – Deirdre Foley has been a tremendous support, as has Amanda Bettison, Tomi Rozman, Karen Nimmo, Mojca Grešak, John Gillespie and others. And for support and help in other ways, gratitude is due to TraceyKay Coe, Melissa Sedmak, Ayhan Alman de la Osa, and Nick Adlington. And, of course, huge gratitude to John for having had the initial idea for *New Gestalt Voices*, rallying the support to get it up and running to the point where it is now very much a going concern, and then passing the editorship to me!

And last but certainly not least, we are extremely grateful to all those who have supported NGV financially, with donations and by placing advertisements – we couldn’t do this without you!

If I had to choose a theme for this edition, I would go with ‘power and vulnerability’. Each writer is grappling with this polarity in their own way. Or maybe this is the lens I am looking through in this moment. Perhaps you will see a different theme, through a different lens.

I applaud the writers for staying with what is real for them, and for their courage in sharing their voices with us here. For five of the contributors, English is not their first language, and we appreciate their willingness to work with us in refining their translations and developing their pieces. The articles speak for themselves, but I offer here a short introduction of each author in acknowledgement of their contribution.

Our initial article is by Deirdre Foley, a first-time contributor who flits between Greece and her homeland of Ireland. She has courageously shared an intimate and personal piece written after a workshop on field theory. On reading this I immediately feel drawn in and fascinated by her allegory/fantasy, through which she elucidates a fresh, original, and multi-layered perspective.

Thomas Ameel’s writing has a wonderful rawness and freshness to it, with a stream of consciousness feel, which we have tried to respect and preserve through the editing process. His inspiration came from a training module, and I experience his piece as a dance on the edge between performing and just being; between the explicit and the implicit. The audio link to Thomas reading his poem adds a personal dimension, drawing us into his world before he goes on to describe his experience of sharing his poem in different contexts, interweaving this with his work as a team coach in his native Belgium.

It is wonderful to find someone at an early stage in their gestalt training courageous enough to write for the journal. I met Tomi Rozman, who is from Slovenia, through the NGV writing support group, where he presented his idea for an article about lunch as a small gestalt session. Within a few days he was sharing pages and pages with us, as they poured out of him in a creative burst. Tomi’s approach is highly original and amusing; his light touch and sense of humour is a refreshing antidote to the earnestness that is often present in gestalt writing (and I count myself as someone who leans towards earnestness!).
My own piece on pushing back started with a small germ of an idea, which then led me to explore how a push turns up in various permutations in my work with clients. I find writing about my work with clients sharpens my mind and my practice, and likewise my practice informs my writing, and both keep me growing as a practitioner and as a person. I am passionate about gestalt psychotherapy, and feel incredibly supported by gestalt theory, which has the capacity to expand and adapt to whatever situation arises.

Following these articles, there’s a report on the recent UKAGP conference, a piece about the research bursary award, and our resident agony uncle, Dr Fake Pearls, brings his inimitable wisdom to bear on a reader’s difficulty.

The period after publishing can be a challenging time for writers, so if a piece has resonated with you, please contact the author and let them know.

And finally, if you would like to become involved in *New Gestalt Voices*, you are most welcome to join us. There are many ways, including through writing, mentoring, sharing ideas for new directions, joining the writing support group or the publicity or editing teams – please do get in touch!

Katerina Papathanasiou, from Greece, has taken on the enormous subject of shame – no small feat – and has dealt with it honestly and openly. I admire Katerina’s courage in sharing her personal experience of shame, including different ways she works with shame in therapy. Her article is both scholarly and personal, demonstrating her passion for and knowledge of this topic.

Ján Ballx, who is originally from the Czech Republic, has contributed his hauntingly beautiful poem. And I’m delighted to say, Ján has also allowed us to reproduce photos of his colourful and striking artwork, which was on display to the public during an exhibition held at the Central Slovakia Gallery.

I initially came across Olena Zozulya’s writing in her article about the experience of war in her native Ukraine, which appeared in the launch edition of this journal. Once again she brings tenderness and sensitivity to her subject, and her writing leaves me with a warm glow. The title, Nekrasota, is a word that doesn’t exist in Russian or English, but its rough translation is ‘unbeauty’. Olena uses this word to describe how character accentuations are a reaction to the unbeauty in human relations. Her article presents an alternative to the world’s views on pathology and psychiatric labels.

DAWN GWILT | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW GESTALT VOICES | JULY 2018
Ever since the launch of *New Gestalt Voices*, we’ve been aware of some whispers of concern within the wider community. More recently, people have told us they feel there’s an elephant in the room that we need to address. Put simply, these concerns amount to a question: why do we need another UK-based journal when we already have the *British Gestalt Journal*?

So, we’d like to take the opportunity to clarify this. We don’t see NGV as being in competition with the much valued and well-established BGJ. Rather, we consider our publication is complementary, with a different purpose and remit. Perhaps it could best be described as an incubator.

The original intention for *New Gestalt Voices* was to provide a platform for students and the newly-qualified to express themselves beyond the constraints of training requirements and academia. We soon found that more experienced gestaltists were also keen to share their writing and other forms of creativity, attracted by the informality, peer support and mentoring, and the sense of community. Consequently, we have expanded our remit to be as inclusive as possible, while maintaining the focus on encouraging those who haven’t published before. The BGJ also offers encouragement, mentoring and support for new writers. NGV is an alternative for those who, for whatever reason, don’t feel ready to approach the BGJ.

We encourage contributors to engage with what is real for them, and to follow their creative energies wherever they may lead. When we connect with our creative energy, we contact a part of ourselves that is young and sometimes vulnerable. Maybe that is the spirit of NGV - to provide a nurturing environment where complete novices, as well as those who have done some writing before, can find and develop their voices, experiment, and build confidence.
In this present moment, as I tap the letters of my keypad, I have no idea what to write. My notes on this weekend's workshop are sparse. My memory of the sequence of events is blurred. I'm poking and prodding at my brain for coherence, but the only image I get is that of a beautiful butterfly aimlessly flitting about in a vast, open field.

I'd like to fly with her in the breeze and feel her lightness. I'm wondering if I reach out and grasp the tip of her wing, will she be strong enough to carry me? What if she isn't? She might come spiralling down and become a wounded, lifeless creature with broken wings. So what should I do? I need to touch this gorgeous butterfly. But I now realize that to do this, I have to be inside the field. I know I'm standing outside because suddenly a barbed wire fence has come into my line of vision.

Barbed wire. An eight-year-old is climbing over a barbed wire fence. She loses her balance, slips, rips herself open. Hospital. Sedation. Operation. Shame. But what has this got to do with anything?

I see the field from a different angle now. But where is my butterfly? She's nowhere to be seen. I notice some tree stumps. Were they there before? I can't say for certain. The field has zoomed back in. Now I'm right up close to the wire, close enough to touch it if I want. I don't want to but I have to if I am to get into the field. And find Butterfly. And mount her. Yes, that's it; that's exactly what I need to do. How else will I get to feel her silken lightness? There's an urgency that accompanies this thought. The wire, the wire, the wire. How to negotiate the damned barbed wire. I look down at my feet. They are not bare. They are wearing shoes, safe shoes with solid soles. Which means the spikes on the wire won't pierce my heel and make me slip. So maybe I can climb over the wire after all. There's my answer. I can climb over the barbed wire fence. I have shoes.
Why am I weeping now? Am I sad or happy? Is there a difference? Does it matter? What matters is that my weeping has hoisted me over the fence and onto the soft blades of grass. Strangely, my shoes are on the other side of the fence. This means I might have to climb back over if I want to retrieve them. If I've done it once, then I can do it again. Or can I? I don't recall how I climbed the fence without my shoes. What if I get trapped inside the field? I can't depend on weeping to hoist me back over when I need to go home. Weeping comes and goes as it pleases. Perhaps Butterfly will carry me out of the field when the time is right. But enough of these thoughts. I'm here now. In the field. This is where I want to be.

I wander for a bit, aware that I'm not alone. There's a presence all around; a row of bushes wedged between two fledgling trees, some orphan marigolds bobbing in the breeze; two ponies side by side; a few scattered sheep, sometimes grazing, sometimes raising their heads expectantly. There is also a fox, a couple of rabbits and in the distance a coyote. But the strongest presence of all is a gigantic bear. He's not in the least like your stereotypical bear. He makes me feel safe in this field. Maybe that's why the rabbits and sheep are not afraid of the fox or the coyote. This is a special field. And I'm thinking, without thinking, that Bear might be able to help me negotiate my patch of barbed wire if I need help. Though, here in the field I'm not too concerned about any of that now. I'm standing in the balmy breeze and it feels refreshing, energizing. Yes, that's the word, energizing.

Bear raises his paw and all the creatures in the field begin to trot, or hop, or leap from place to place. I join them, my bare feet marching in rhythm and arms swinging like pendulums. It's fun, it's liberating. Until I begin to feel tired. I'm glad when Bear raises his paw once more. We can all slow down now. The sheep stop moving and graze some more. The coyote wriggles her way into their fold. Coyote is a nuisance. It wants to get noticed. 'Look at me, look at me. See my sleek pelt, my cute, agile body. Try to catch me if you dare'. I stay clear of it.

Boredom is creeping up on me. I search for Bear but he's standing still and he has turned his back to us all. Why? Well, two can play at that game. So I also come to a halt and stare into the nothingness of the landscape. Stasis. But I feel my toes stinging. I can't remain still. I'm standing on a bunch of nettles, not grass at all.

Nettles and barbed wire. Somehow they belong together. With this flash of images, Butterfly comes and lands on me. Like a magnet, she lifts me up and transports me to a space where the blades of grass are wispy soft. I sit, she sways, a dreamlike sway. She is smooth, calm, serene. She folds herself into a kind of smile, a silken smile. Is there such a thing? There must be because I am here and I can see it. I think. Is it real? Now I'm not so sure it's a smile at all. I focus. I am so focused, my eyes contorted, my brain twisting itself into so many knots that I'm getting palpitations. I'm lost in this moment. Alone. Until the sound of Bear's bellowing voice hits my ears. He wants us to gather round, form a circle. I stay where I am. I'm in the place I want to be. It feels familiar. Butterfly has floated away. To my left Coyote is poised, tense, tight. I don't want to see it. I use my hair as a curtain. I am stuck.

Dusk makes my eyelids heavy. Darkness falls
like a black shroud. And sleep creeps up on me.

I dream I'm in a house, cooking dinner. As I peel and chop, I have flashbacks to a world where I had young children, a world I created, manufactured, moulded, sugar coated; a world of make believe, of fairy godmothers and knights in shining armour. I see myself in that old world. I had a magic wand, as powerful as any that has ever existed. No wicked witch or ugly ogre could ever get near my kingdom. My wand saw to that. Until it broke. There is no magic in a broken wand. I'm scared now. My dream is unsettling. But not all witches are wicked, are they? And ogres can be the gentlest creatures in the world, can't they?

Snap. Eyes wide open. I'm awake again, back in the field. It's different somehow. Smaller. I'm still in the circle but not in my place. Coyote is opposite me, staring. Fox is beside it. The sheep, the ponies, the rabbits, they're all present. And quiet. Very very quiet. Bear is to my right. He's staring at something. But where is Butterfly? We are all so silent.

The flutter of wings. I hear it. It's not my imagination. I follow the sound. It's getting louder. It has to be Butterfly. But why has my breathing become so laboured? Flutter, flutter, flutter. Butterflies flutter, I know they do. Where is she?

Then I see it. A moth. Huge, dark, ominous. Bear is staring at it, willing it to settle. Flutter, flutter, flutter. The sound is getting closer, closer. Now it's inside my ears, scratching, trying to get into my head. Flutter, flutter, flutter. But I won't let it in. Because if I do, I might not be able to breathe. The sound of its wings fluttering in my ear reminds me of something I don't want to be reminded of. I want it to stop.

Flutter, flutter, flutter, flutter, whirr, flutter, whirr, flutter, whirr, flutt...
And silence. At last silence. Peace.

Bear has taken Moth in his huge, gentle paws and is soothing its tired wings. How easily he could crush it. Moths are more fragile than butterflies. They may be harder to catch but they are easier to kill. It... she looks so vulnerable now, curled up in Bear's softness. She is almost beautiful, but so painfully inert. How exhausted she must be. All that energy trying to be a magnificent butterfly. Trying not to be the moth that she is.

~ diary submission for workshop on field theory (Athens Gestalt Foundation, October 2016)

Like the piece itself, my experience of re-reading this diary eighteen months after I wrote it feels surreal. It has also stirred in me a great deal of emotion. I remember coming away from this seminar, at the start of my second year, feeling quite overwhelmed, almost dizzy I could say. Field theory seemed both extremely complex and simple at the same time. The experiential exercises had been, paradoxically, both suffocating and liberating. A week later, I sat down to get the diary written. Generally, I enjoyed the reflective writing tasks. But for the first time it was like my brain had pressed ‘delete'; my memory was fuzzy and my words were fuzzier. It was frustrating. So I decided to write the truth and if the diary was to end up being only two or three sentences long, so be it. I knew my mentor would be okay with this.
The image of the butterfly appeared and disappeared in flashes; it could have been so easily ignored. Somehow though, I felt it was relevant so I willed it into focus and stayed with it, having no idea where it would take me. At the time, it felt like the piece wrote itself. This process of letting my pen take over, trusting that it will make sense of my chaos, is familiar to me. It got me through bouts of writer’s block when I was on my master’s course in creative writing. It is always a surreal experience and it is always immensely therapeutic.

My mentor’s feedback on the diary was, “At every moment, you are the centre of an ever-changing, phenomenological field. Confident to follow the flow of the process, to destruct and be destructed, finally you come to awareness. That’s the task of the therapist as well, in order to allow (or help) the client to become aware of her/his process.” (Georgos Diplas, Athens Gestalt Foundation, 2016). I have a better understanding now of what he was telling me and as I prepare to enter my fourth year, revisiting this diary submission has reinforced my commitment to and belief in gestalt theory and practise.

Deirdre Foley is about to enter her final year of training at the Gestalt Foundation in Athens. She has a background in social sciences and psychology, and a masters’ degree in creative writing. She is co-founder of New Gestalt Voices in Greece, which is aiming to publish its first journal in December 2018. In addition, Deirdre writes fiction, and her first novel has just been published. deetel@hotmail.co.uk
A TEAM COACH ABOUT TO GO ROG

by Thomas Ameel

I need contact but please don't get too serious
don't get too performance or delivery
I'll retreat, flatline and get shivery

with structure I have a love-hate thing
I need it to contain my zing
I need it for my peace of mind and stabilitywise
but if I'm nervous it becomes a panic button
I get stuck in a tunnel, I can't improvise

and what about that improv, by the way
why don't I dare to give that some more quality
because those are moments that I thrive,
my energy boosts and I help the implicit to come alive

well, I'm afraid, anxious to look like I didn't prepare
can't bear leaving all that space, even with time to spare
can't bear the feeling to have no plan
can't bear that they think I'm not the leading man

One thing I do trust, that's my energy
it benefits from connection and works relationally
nourished by process & the here and now, I know
my energy lifts up, and I'll be in my flow
but once the operational mill starts to turn, the actions, KPIs and products make me yearn for the times when my energy was still complete all I feel now is a grumpy deplete

there’s the real struggle of my coaching style because I’m not just there for the process I’m there to coach the team, I’d better get off my isle I’d better get things running, get some results and keep my reputation stunning

pfff, I’m losing all that precious energy... I can’t show that, I can’t share, nor resign, have to keep going, keep em running and shine

looking back on these words and me on this stage, I see a parallel I’m easily influenced by that all-time famous corporate spell deliver, perform, excel and impress often in the explicit and in the implicit far too less

so complaining about the cognitive and rational is easy the solution is to be appropriately different and less pleasy to make time for sensing and exploring and I know, daring that, would make my job far less boring
I feel I’ve been postponing this piece for a while. The deadline is creeping up on me and I’m afraid I’ll have to resign. I have to get my energy running, gear up, push forward, make an extra effort, ‘knallen’ as we say in Flemish. I need to get my courage out, the clock is ticking and I need to perform.

Writing these words makes me feel I lose my energy. It’s not a big hole through which all my energy falls, like a basketball that doesn’t touch the rim. No, it’s a rather subtle, little hole, somewhere hidden, hard to distinguish. But it’s there all right; I feel how it lowers the level of my energy slowly, bit by bit. So, pushing myself for that extra stretch, for that gearing up, provokes the exact opposite. And after having felt that postponing sense in the back of my mind for a couple of weeks, I realise now it’s a damn parallel process I’m stuck in. My poem talks about how I lose my energy in a field of explicit performance, where I feel I have to perform, where I feel there’s a lot on me and the audience is expecting. I lose my energy because there’s no contact in that performing.

And after having felt that postponing sense in the back of my mind for a couple of weeks, I realise now it’s a damn parallel process I’m stuck in. My poem talks about how I lose my energy in a field of explicit performance, where I feel I have to perform, where I feel there’s a lot on me and the audience is expecting. I lose my energy because there’s no contact in that performing.

I need contact but please don’t get too serious
don’t get too performance or delivery
I’ll retreat, flatline and get shivery

pfft, I’m losing all that precious energy..
I can’t show that, I can’t share, nor resign,
have to keep going, keep em running and shine

Pff, just got a strong flair of performance anxiety lurking around the corner. ‘I can never write something people will actually find interesting enough to read, it’ll be flat and superficial’. I take on responsibility. I can’t leave too much space, because that’ll make people think I’m not in control. People will interpret I’m not prepared, I’m not up for it. Let’s quickly fill up that space, no time for improvising or emerging now, my credibility is at stake.

What am I writing anyways? Where is this going? Away, together with my energy? Damn, why did I choose to do this, confronting myself with my depletion. Running on empty.

Makes me think of the first chapter of Marie-Anne Chidiac’s recent book on relational organisational gestalt (ROG). It narrates the tension between the modernist approach in organisation development (OD) and the emergent approach. The first stemming from a century of positivism, crystallized in a view of an organisation as a machine. Just tweak and tune a few bits and bops and the machine runs again. Meaning, just analyze the problem in its isolation and firmly resolve to adapt certain behaviors and all will go well.

In the battle with my performance anxiety I’d sure benefit from a quick, modernist resolution. Taking the time to sense and explore, to ‘not know’, to emerge, forces me to cope longer with the anxiety, which is challenging.

Hmm, another parallel with working in organisations?

well, I’m afraid, anxious to look like I didn’t prepare
can’t bear leaving all that space, even with time to spare
can’t bear the feeling to have no plan
can’t bear that they think I’m not the leading man
So, if I’m the team coach in front of a gang of positivistic inspired hyenas, waiting for me to pinpoint the exact flaw in their collaboration, my performance is paramount. I have to be up to the task. I need an abundance of experience, preferably culminating in ‘tips and tricks’, in ‘do’s and don’ts’. I have to be their hero, saving their day… yes, only today, because tomorrow, I’m not sure if it’ll still stand out in their workload. And the funny thing is, I’m standing there, realizing I’m stepping into that treadmill myself. As if something is also very appealing there. I’m obviously not the victim of some OD kidnapping. I’m not the hostage of the firm I freelance for, I could easily choose not to work for them anymore.

Hmm, I feel I’d have to dig in my own awareness now. And I feel some resistance there. I’m resistant to finding my own little boy, wanting to shine on that stage. Because it’s so easy to drop in on that gang of hyenas and show I have a bigger mouth of teeth. Pull out that shot of energy and overload them with some kind of complex model, so they are impressed. Next I’m leaning back a bit, resting on my elbow, receiving that praise with a smug smile, leaving some silence for them to be overwhelmed. Obviously I can’t live off that success for the rest of the day, but for now I can keep the vultures at bay.

So if I make my implicit explicit, I see how I enjoy the kick, the shot of adrenaline I get when I manage to be the hero of the day. And I seem to choose those ‘quick wins’, those environments in which I need only some slick models, some confrontational interventions and they carry me on hands, singing the slogans of their corporate choirs.

It’s a quick fix, it’s a fast and short term return on investment. When I step out I turn my back and don’t look over my shoulder.

I also feel now how difficult it is to do that exact opposite. To stay with the unknown and the uncertain, so the wisdom will come up by itself, from the bottom. I feel it because I’m free writing at the moment. Just writing what comes up in my stream of thoughts, associating and reflecting on this topic.

Hmm, I could dig into some chocolate I just bought before. That’ll give me a short hit for a moment.
Pff, I'm in that implicit, improvising and searching. Writing freely, feeling that it's far from accomplishing, far from successful, just the beginning of a process. And that's heavy, that evokes some anxiety, because I have to deliver at the very end. Pff, no wonder I'm so easily influenced by that all-time famous corporate spell. I need my own quick hits, my shots, the junkie in me is never far away. It's still there anyways.

and what about that improv, by the way
why don't I dare to give that some more quality
because those are moments that I thrive,
my energy boosts and I help the implicit to come alive

well, I'm afraid, anxious to look like I didn't prepare
can't bear leaving all that space, even with time to spare
can't bear the feeling to have no plan
can't bear that they think I'm not the leading man

HIGH ON AWARENESS

Just had some chocolate and changed the music on my headphones from almost classical to pounding techno. Interesting...

I really feel how lingering in that unknown process at a certain point starts to get on my nerves, it takes a lot from me. I need some comfort, I need some certainty. I've been free writing for an hour now and that simmering anxiety turned into a full blown feeling of vagueness, undefinable what I was doing, what this would lead to.

With my history of drug addiction, that's what I used to do constantly. Whenever I wasn't able to contain any kind of feeling I'd blow a joint, go to a bar to get drunk or seek a party with more than just music on offer. That's what I'm aware of now. I go for my 72% chocolate, spiking my endorphin level and switch from my floating cello and piano music to some Derrick May combination of bass and drums. The latter equally spiking adrenaline levels, and strongly reminiscent of the highs I had when partying hard.

And again some curious awareness...

Right before I started writing down this piece on chocolate and Derrick May, I was gulping my chocolate without even properly tasting it. I was down to the last bar, four pieces left and I felt unstoppable, I would down these last as fast as I did with the rest. At that very moment it dawned on me what was happening. My urging sense of short term need satisfaction had moved into awareness and I started to understand what was happening to me. The awareness mobilized something stronger than the urge to gulp those last bits of chocolate, being the intellectual high of understanding that process and the parallel.

And by writing down my understanding of my own process, linking it back to my history of serial short term need satisfaction, I soothed my needs for a fix. So, when I was about to go for those last four pieces of chocolate, the unstoppable urge had gone. I could choose again. I could choose if I wanted to eat that chocolate or not, and I decided I had had enough.

But, let's get back to that OD process I get stuck in. I'm still enjoying Derrick May's pounding skills and I feel this might be some of the support I need right now. I could easily get very judgmental on my lasting urge to get my shot, be it just with some techno, but I feel it supports me right now.
OLD HEROES DIE HARD

So, what happens in those OD contexts seems to be an interesting parallel. I started freelancing as a team coach about three years ago. Since then I’ve almost solely worked in very commercial environments. I’ve seen banking, insurance, consultancy, and for the moment I’m spending my time among teams of an airport company. All of these companies are very profit oriented. More than not, I met teams under stress, under deadlines and KPIs (key performance indicators). I’ve seen an abundance of team members who made me worry if they’d make it to the end of the year. Lots of pressure and performance.

It’s a context living of short term satisfactions. At the end of a day of team coaching, they want something concrete, actions they can implement. Just meeting each other, sharing and deepening contact, would be a waste of time. Just taking time to stir in a pool of implicit sensing, would be uncontainable.

And then there I am, with my own need for satisfaction, with my old addictive habits that die hard and find their new ways in working hard... or getting my shot being the hero in a commercial environment.

And it’s happening again. I was excited and satisfied understanding my process, seeing what happens to me in the context of writing this piece and in the context of those organisations. A little bit of accomplishment had nourished me. But now, having written this, again I don’t know where it’s going. And again I start to feel a bit lost, a bit as if I can’t keep my ground, as if I lose that ground under my feet. It feels too much like standing still, this processing, this stirring.

And that’s again exactly what happens in those organisations. Standing still is wasting time, as Frans Meulmeester said with the title of his book on gestalt OD.

there's the real struggle of my coaching style because I'm not just there for the process I'm there to coach the team, I'd better get off my isle I'd better get things running, get some results and keep my reputation stunning

ADDITION DYNAMICS

So how to summarize for a moment?

What I feel is the standing still, spending time in the unknown, at a certain point becomes difficult to bear. I lose some ground and I need a shot to fill my emptiness. I go for chocolate and techno, habits from a stubborn past, but very efficient in short term satisfaction and stuffing.

The parallel with my work in profit oriented companies is exactly that addiction dynamics. The profit, the deadlines, the KPIs are shots that keep them going. Kicks that keep them away from what’s implicitly going on.

And then I come in. This team coach wanting to do some damn gestalt, wanting to spend some time in the implicit with them. No no, eventually we’ll get to something explicit, but first stay with me.

The pull of the field is immense. I’m trying to resist their call for satisfaction, but with my set of old habits, it’s so hard to keep my ground. I resonate. I give in before we really properly sit with that implicit. I find it difficult to leave space, to allow silence or doubt. I crave that satisfaction as well. So I jump into the concrete, into the tangible. I sketch some
model up a flip, I make a list of arguments, I summarize their discussion, whatever. As long as we have something explicit in our hands. And finally I steer towards some lovely short term satisfying action plans.

It would be easy to think maybe I'm not the man to work in organisations, realizing what I just realized. And to be honest, untangling my process it crosses my mind. Even more when I reread my poem and understand how contradictory this all is. After all, I'm writing verse after verse about my need for contact, improv, the implicit, and I just understood how I get so easily seduced by that promise of the actionable, explicit fix! It's so difficult to keep my ground in those commercial environments. Even when I know, that fix always turns out to be a fraud. At the end of the day I'm wrecked and depleted, deprived of the long term satisfaction I could have had when connecting.

-but once the operational mill starts to turn, the actions, KPIs and products make me yearn for the times when my energy was still complete all I feel now is a grumpy deplete

But luckily I have one precious experience in a not-for-profit organisation, where I facilitated a team coaching. And there I did manage to stay with the implicit much longer.

It was hard at times and I remember during lunch breaking my head over the continuation of the process in the afternoon. Feeling the pull of the explicit. But in that field I felt much more ground. I could stay put much longer, I could hold it easier. And by the end of the day, beautifully, it all emerged effortlessly. They did end up with a list of topics they wanted to proceed on, but it wasn't a micro-habit action plan and at the same time it was a list of actionable topics. But the beauty was they did it all themselves. I didn't have to facilitate one tiny bit. It all bubbled up in the last 30-minutes. And the bulk of our time together was spent in the implicit, exploring, searching, sharing.

Pfiew, lucky me, I seem to have some future in team coaching. But for the moment, it does seem I need to top up my frustration tolerance levels to be able to cultivate uncertainty within profit oriented organisations.

Listen to that last sentence. The hyenas are showing up again. The demanding field of performance hit me with a desperate spasm. If I put on my gestalt glasses, the question is what do I need to stay put, where can I get my support to contain?

And the satisfaction I'm feeling now, having written all this on my way to London, is far more lasting than those shots I got from that 72% chocolate bar or those beats massaging my eardrums...

-so complaining about the cognitive and rational is easy the solution is to be appropriately different and less pleasy to make time for sensing and exploring and I know, daring that, would make my job far less boring

PERFORMANCE OR CONNECTION?

I shared my poem. I shared it with a group of gestalt colleagues, equally in search for more relationality in their coaching work, craving to go fully ROG. It was an interesting experience. I had been thinking about sharing it, but felt it would be more for the sake of performing, to gain some praise. And that I didn't like.
So when the question of courage in our work was raised, a question I had put forward, but which had been in our field all day, I started telling the story of my poem. Immediately there were some reactions. People wanted to hear it. I was authentically reluctant.

So I continued talking about courage and how I felt I lacked the courage in front of a team to be authentic, to be perceived as weird. But still the idea of the poem was hanging in the air.

So the question was raised. What would I need to have the courage to share my poem with this group? And I realized there was a potential parallel. If we could support my courage to share my poem, if we could understand what I needed to bring it here, for this partly new group of people, I would have a better sense of the support I lacked in working relationally in organisations.

So, I realized it felt exposing and uncomfortable if putting my poem out there was in order to find praise and adoration. If the aim was to impress and excel, I wouldn't feel supported. But the people were genuinely interested and curious. And they helped me realize it would be different if I could look at the poem as just another way of talking, as just a way of communicating and sharing, for the purpose of connecting. It felt that would be a way to bring myself to an equal level, to feel the people around me and to feel less alone, less on a stage.

So I did it and I felt very calm, very grounded. I read the words very clearly, no stuttering, no tripping over my words, reading and looking around at the people in the group. And I felt that I was reaching out, that I was connecting, that we were on the same page.

That was so supportive.

I had asked them to give me some insight into their resonances, no praise please. And it worked. When hearing what people resonated with, I really felt the support, the connection. I felt comforted by the realization those people around me were going through the same experiences as me. When somebody would start to praise the quality of the poem, I felt it became more difficult. Shame was not far away then. In the performance there seems to be so much fragility, loneliness and some disconnection. I found it difficult to stay with the compliments and the likes. Saying that helped.

My poem is all about personal presence. I show myself in my vulnerability. Being the little boy who wants to be seen by performing, but feels that actually keeps him away from his real need, connecting.. though he could be seen by connecting.

So if I bring this to my coaching I would ask myself ‘How can I authentically use my vulnerability in my work, connect more and heighten my presence with teams? What support would I need?’

As I felt this afternoon among my gestalt colleagues, it’s about going away from the performance. It’s such a lonely and fragile place, up on that stage. So if I can stay away from my attempt to be the hero, to bring the solution and to know it all. If I can feel that showing vulnerability could be a way to support the team. If I could connect as a means to help them define their needs... I would walk home with a shot of sustainable, lasting satisfaction, energized with connection.
And that connection would make me feel more supported to be human like them. I am not there to show them the light, I am there to help them elaborate on their experience of the darkness. Once the darkness is more clear to them, the light will already have come.

One thing I do trust, that's my energy it benefits from connection and works relationally nourished by process & the here and now, I know my energy lifts up, and I'll be in my flow

FALLING OUT OF DIALOGUE INTO PERFORMANCE

I performed my poem. I immediately see the difference. I'm writing ‘performed’ as opposed to ‘shared’ when I wrote the previous piece. And that’s exactly how the process has gone with John, one of the editors of New Gestalt Voices. I was performing, I was powering and controlling, stepping over my real vulnerability and afterwards I felt ashamed and silly. Reminds me of a phrase in one of my ROG modules: ‘if you fall out of dialogue, you've probably fallen into a habitual pattern of contact’.

I guess I was deflecting from my anxiety. It’s easy to go into a judgmental mode now, to think I haven’t done good.

But, the first thing I realize is that what helped me to support my vulnerability with the group of gestalt coaches is not necessarily what would help me in supporting my vulnerability the next time, with John. That was my reasoning. ‘I had a good experience sharing it with the group on Friday, stating the aim of sharing and not performing, so if I do it the same way here, with John, it'll be fine’. And I unilaterally installed that same pursuit on the exchange with John. So I definitely fell out of dialogue.

And if I take a closer look at the parallel, at the resemblances with my work in organisations, I think I often step into that treadmill. The ‘best practices’ of other coaches, previous workshops and trainings, I take them with me in my suitcase and apply them often without really checking in on my awareness of myself, the other and the situation.

When I write this down I feel some tension in my chest and am aware how it’s so much about containing my own anxiety in front of that team of leaders or employees. As I wrote above, I can’t always resist the pull of the field, in need of a quick fix and a soothing high. I can’t always hold the delay. And that’s when I pull out my suitcase, filled with heroic interventions to be chosen from.

Same thing happened with John. ‘Can’t hold my anxiety, let’s go for that best practice from last week, that'll do the job.’

I had recorded it when I read the poem to John. And when I listened to the recording of this ‘performance’, it was flat, dry and bloodless. Just like I am when under high performance in front of a team. I had retreated.

So a lot of courage would be needed to take my time for the self-other-situation check. Because in that very moment, I’m stepping into my own not-knowing. And it might seem as if I don't come prepared, as if I don't know what we’re going to do. And often it feels quite strenuous to contain that insecurity, that anxiety. The easy way out is to unilaterally impose an intervention ‘because
it worked fine the last time’.

This often goes accompanied by a feeling of pushing and pulling, a feeling of dragging the team to a place I want them to go. That feeling came up this morning in ‘performing’ for John. It’s a known feeling for me. It usually comes up in the morning, when starting a team coaching and I’m still in my ‘first encounter anxiety’. I don’t find a way to use that awareness as a way to connect. So I jump over my anxiety and impose, without attuning. That’s the quick fix. ‘Aaah, I’m doing something concrete, no more doubt. That feels good.’

and what about that improv, by the way
why don’t I dare to give that some more quality
because those are moments that I thrive,
my energy boosts and I help the implicit to come alive

well, I’m afraid, anxious to look like I didn’t prepare
can’t bear leaving all that space, even with time to spare
can’t bear the feeling to have no plan
can’t bear that they think I’m not the leading man

GOING ROG

Today I shared my poem on Skype with Dawn, another editor of this magazine. I had never met her before, but I managed to feel supported. We took time to check in on our mutual needs for the sharing. The needs we had with this person, in this situation.

The exchange of what we both needed was very connecting. A solid ground was laid out and I felt steady and calm.

So instead of going for that best practice of resonance sharing, which had worked for me before, we went for the relational exchange.

Easy as that. I can’t say a lot more about it, because that’s all it was and it worked swell.

After this Skype, I made three more recordings to use for the audio. They were lively, they were dynamic and intense, they all had colour and energy. I had been nourished.

One thing I do trust, that’s my energy
it benefits from connection and works relationally
nourished by process & the here and now, I know
my energy lifts up, and I’ll be in my flow

CONCLUSION

If I bring this all back to my work in organisations, it boils down to this simple thing. If I can make time for a relational exchange, it’ll create a more supportive field. A field in which I will feel more support to use my vulnerability, to connect in an authentic way and to hold uncertainty. I feel a bit silly writing this, because from a relational gestalt perspective, this is so damn obvious!

Don’t you think it’s curious how this basic need of any field gets overlooked so easily when I find myself in an organisational field? A lot of performing, showing off, deflecting, making drama, retroflecting, driveling and blabla. But the basic need of the field? Lost.

And surprising now is how I feel I have nothing more to write. This is it. It is as simple as this. Reminds me of this phrase at the beginning of Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, where Perls said "I would like to start out with very simple ideas which, as always, are difficult to grasp because they are so simple".

So all this sensing, exploring and wandering in the not-knowing in this text has led me to this simple essence. Actionable and concrete.
Lovely. I got my shot. I'm satisfied.

Dear reader, I would be very curious to have some contact with you. It would make my text feel less a performance and more a reaching out. It would make it more an encounter with you and I'd feel less on a stage.

So if you resonate with some of what I share, or if you strongly don't, or whatever you are aware of, and you feel like sharing a short word, please be welcome in my mailbox.

REFERENCES


Thomas Ameel is a EAGT registered gestalt psychotherapist, working part time in private practice in Brussels, Belgium. The rest of his time he is looking for opportunities to smuggle gestalt into organisations, working with teams and coaching leaders. thomas.ameel@gmail.com
“Family lunch is a small gestalt session,” says a gestalt practitioner. “How do you know?” X enquires. “Well, there are chairs. Sometimes, they’re empty,” the practitioner replies.

Now, let me continue with short situations:

**SITUATION 1**

*Lunch at Family A - comments about the food*

- Mother-in-law (guest): “There’s no salt on this salad.”
- Mother-in-law to her husband, who has taken a ladle to a pot: “Don’t bother searching; you’ll not find any.” (any = pieces of meat)
- Mother-in-law: “I’ve eaten better chicken wings at restaurant X than here.”

**SITUATION 2**

*Lunch at Family B - comments about the food*

- Mother-in-law: “This roast is very nicely salted.”
- Mother-in-law: “These ribs are so crusty and tasty.”
- Mother-in-law (to her son in law #2): “Your grilling skills are excellent.”

**Guess who has closer relations with mother-in-law, Family A or Family B?**

**SITUATION 3**

My mother, who is sometimes difficult to talk to (e.g. over the phone) and who is unconsciously stuck in playing ‘games’, brings me some fresh lettuce from her garden. This is her language, her way of communication, via food. She insists on giving us something, either because she cannot give anything (material) but food (as an expression of love), or, we are not capable of growing a proper salad (my ego talking). When we eat together, she either joins the table later or eats quickly and leaves early to tidy the kitchen, even before we leave. Conversations about the food are rare, mostly about the recipes (e.g. “Is this new recipe any good?”) and the way she prepared the food. She always says about the food which is specially prepared for me, “There’s nothing in it” (which means, don’t worry, it doesn’t contain animal products).
eight years, she still sometimes comments, “What should I cook for you if you don’t eat anything?” As she knows very well what to cook, because she has proved it many times, this probably shows some sort of cognitive dissonance or, 'I don't understand you and your ways.'

SITUATION 4

When my kids and I are not in good contact (yes, it happens occasionally), or they are worried, they complain about the food at the table more than usual.

Kid: “The potato chips are too soft” or “The potato chips are too big, I prefer the thin ones” or “I don’t like (insert random ingredient) within (insert random dish). Can I take it out?”

Another kid: “I don’t like the salad you make. I'll fix my own.”

Another kid (overfilling her plate, again): “Of course, I'll eat everything.” She doesn't.

These are the most difficult situations for my wife and I, and in all these years we haven't figured out how to deal with them. Each time, the feelings, reactions and outcomes are different. Sometimes I don't mind. Sometimes I am hurt because of their rejection of my food (which is probably how my mother feels when I reject her food). Sometimes I am angry. No theoretical approach seems to work. The best I can do in such situations is just be there; sit and patiently wait.4

SITUATION 5

When I was a youngster, my father usually rejected the meals prepared by my mother. She would heat them up repeatedly. He would come home late or if he was at home he'd say, “I'm not hungry.” Later, at night, when he came home drunk and was alone in the kitchen, he used to eat all the left-overs.

The meals were the only contact points with my family at that time, and the atmosphere during the meals was usually tense. The arguments between my parents normally started over food (e.g. “What's wrong with the rice? You don't know how to cook it”) and then would escalate to reveal the real reason for the argument. The real reason was never the food, but emotional distance and an unwillingness to listen to each other. This pattern worsened as their relations worsened. Eventually, they divorced.

My last confrontation with my father, when I was 17 or so, also started over the food: “Why are you cutting the sausage with the bread knife?” The argument escalated quickly but it ended very differently than previous times, when he would always manage to ‘break’ me (my will/toughness). This time, he didn't break me, I didn't cry and from then on he didn't verbally attack me anymore. I'm not sure how I managed to stay strong and keep my poker face on (it took an enormous amount of energy), but I did, and it made all the difference. Now I realize that his question was not about the food, but, “Why are you not doing it the right way? My way is the right way. Why are you doing things your way? I don't like that.”

A similar pattern is being repeated with my in-laws. When my wife and I distanced ourselves from traditional cooking, we (not intentionally) distanced our bonds with the in-laws. So yes, food is so deeply interwoven with our feelings and family bonds that each attempt to change the dietary habits/ways of cooking ends in the disturbance of the field -
interpersonal bonds.

**SITUATION 6**

My gestalt training consisted of 3-day sessions in a simple hotel which included meals and overnight stay. In the dining room, there was a separate table for people who did not consume animal products. During the first session, three or four people sat at this table. By the end of the 2-year training, one third of the trainees sat at this table. It was interesting to see how the compassion within the group evolved. The people who sat around this table developed deeper connections with each other partly because of a sense of belonging to the same tribe which was based on the same dietary preferences. Of course, the same was also true for the ‘normal’ table. I remember once the waiter put a sheet of paper on this table with the title, 'Vegetarians.' I turned the paper around, drew a brontosaurus and wrote under it, 'Herbivores'. This caused a lot of laughter at the time and it still makes me laugh when I remember the incident. The tension was relieved and suddenly we didn’t take ourselves so seriously as before. It’s just food, isn’t it? Even though the meals weren’t meant to be gestalt sessions, we subconsciously treated them as if they were. Or, better, they were ‘prolonged gestalt sessions’, where we further developed connections and revealed our soft sides.

**SITUATION 7**

“Let's visit grandmother,” my kids sometimes say.
“Why?” I ask.
“Because she will fry chicken for us and you never do”, they reply.

This is not true. We prepare fried chicken for our kids occasionally, but this is not the point. The point is they want to have relations with their grandparents. Last Sunday, the same situation arose. My eldest kid, who had called grandmother and asked for fried wings, didn’t even touch them when we arrived there.

**SITUATION 8**

The birthday party of my niece at my brother-in-law’s. They had prepared a special version of the food for me and my wife, which excluded animals. When the father of my brother-in-law, a die-hard meat-eater, saw our plates over the table, he said with a sour-faced smile, “What do you think, you are special? Do you think you are a special kind of God for whom people need to prepare extra food?” Later, thinking about this statement, I thought that he did not accept my eating habits and consequently me as a person. Then I adjusted my understanding: he did not accept himself. How do I know that? I found out a few days later, he had been diagnosed with cancer and the doctors had suggested he should change his diet, specifically, to exclude animal products. He didn’t want to. Sadly, he died a few weeks after.

**THOUGHTS**

Usually, in academic papers, now would be the time to introduce research questions and hypotheses. I won't do that. Instead, I will try to shape the main thoughts derived from the previous situations, which are the focus points around which my writing revolves.

**THOUGHT 1**

Talking (interacting) about (with) the food is talking about relations.
THOUGHT 2
My relation to food might reveal my relations to the people with whom I eat. The same might be true for others too.

THOUGHT 3
Being attentive during the meals might give me insights and clues about the relations and current psychological state of the family and situations beyond the food.

MY STORY

When I changed my eating habits 8-years ago (I excluded animal products), my relations with the family and friends changed greatly. Changing my eating habits caused more social issues than I ever imagined. Now I see it as a process of my individuation through food. All the situations I have gone through have made me think about how food determines relations, or (worse), how food represents the foundation of relations. My primary family (parents) needed one year to accept it, another year to remember it, and another year to start preparing at least some food without animals on our rare lunches together. Similarly, my wife's parents' process of accepting took the same amount of time.

On both sides, creative adjustment happened. My mother and my wife's parents now prepare special food for us when we have lunch at their place. My wife and I include meat for them when they have lunch at our place. Nevertheless, they occasionally still comment on it, how meat is necessary for living (even though they have severe health problems because of it and their lifestyle in general). Example: just to confirm their bias, they repeat the old story about an 80-year-old man who eats only meat and is in perfect condition.

At the beginning of my and my wife's food adventure, we occasionally commented on how their eating habits are not healthy. We gave up commenting because it only triggered resistance and had no effect. Anyhow, a fragile balance is slowly being established.

During our extended family meetings, for example anniversaries, which usually include meals, nothing important is said. Nobody mentions, for example, the 'elephants in the room'. Nobody talks about his or her feelings. The talk is shallow and indirect. Nevertheless, the most important things are still being said. How? Indirectly, through talking/interaction about/with the food. Why do I believe that? Let me explain.

The gestalt training I attended follows A. Höfer's integrative gestalt pedagogics, which is defined as “healing soul shepherdship incorporating Christian anthropology and tradition”, delivered by the Slovenian association DKGP and the Faculty of Theology, Ljubljana. After finishing the two years of the first level training (gestalt pedagogy) I have decided to continue to the second level (gestalt counselling).

During my gestalt training, which was highly experiential and group-oriented, we used all kinds of artistic activities to express what is usually unspeakable.

For example, in the first half of the session we used crayons to draw scenes which appeared during initial guided meditations. We coloured pre-prepared pictures. We modelled with clay. We used pantomime and our bodies to represent our feelings and scenarios. We used psychodrama and family constellations. We danced. And so
on. Because words are not enough to fully express what is going on within us right now.

The second part of the gestalt sessions included discussions about our ‘artistic’ creations. In small groups of 3 to 5, we discussed the properties, for example, of our crayon drawings or little clay statues. The group leader (we called him a ‘companion’) introduced the discussions with the questions about the picture. For example, he or she asked the group, “What do you see in this drawing?”, “What surprises you in this drawing?”, “Where do you feel good about this drawing? Show us!” “What do you smell or taste, if you look at this drawing?” The ‘artist’ listened during the first part while other team members talked about his or her drawing.

Group members talking about the drawing usually and surprisingly revealed things about the artist, who remained silent, or a specific event. These insights usually opened the door to deeper conversations about the drawing, which led to insights that were useful for all group members, not only for the artist. Using this technique, the figure (the artist's current problem) clearly stood out from the background (the issues which were not so relevant). After the group companion exhausted the questions to the group, he directed his questions at the artist: “How was your process of creating this drawing?”, “What did you want to show us with this drawing?” It is almost a rule that at this point the artist started talking about the real events instead of the picture. A lot of times the artist might say to the group, “I am astonished how you saw (insert a detail on the picture) and how your associations hit the spot.”

To be more specific, in one such session the group observed the crayon drawing of a car and a family in it. Someone from the group said, “When I look at this car, I smell pizza.” The other person from the group spontaneously said, “When I look at the family in this car, I hear loud screams.” The other said, “When I look at this picture, I feel a pain in my arm.” Then the artist, a little bit shocked, explained, “This drawing represents an event from my childhood, when my grandparents drove me to the pizzeria. As we were returning, another car hit us and all I can remember were screams and my grandfather’s hand, who was trying to restrain me. He broke his arm.”

If the companion felt the event needed to be brought into the foreground even more, then he used his creativity to drive the process in the right direction. For example, he might search for chairs, put them in the position as they are in a car. He would invite group members to take seats, sit still (pantomime) and play the scene from the car. The artist could be invited by the companion to observe the scene from all angles. The companion might ask the artist to change the scene to better fit his current inner state, or even completely reconfigure it, to release the tension. Sometimes, the relief was achieved. Lastly, the companion closed the gestalt session. The artist could express a wish about how to close a session: with a song, prayer, group hug, silence, eternal ommmm ... anything that comforted him. Finally, gratitude from all the members would be expressed before the session closed.

It is really astonishing how this kind of gestalt group process works. With my current level of knowledge, I cannot convincingly explain how it is possible that group members ‘know’ the hidden details and clues about the author of the picture. When I experienced
such an event for the first time, I thought it was a mere coincidence. For my analytic mind and natural sciences background in education, it was difficult to accept how it is possible that the group can ‘know’ such specific details about the other person. Now, after finishing the first 2-years of basic gestalt training plus an additional year of second level training, I no longer think it is a coincidence. Probably there are some not yet explained subconscious mechanisms in progress which come to the foreground within the group session if the conditions are right. Maybe this kind of phenomenon occurs because of the background - figure focalization happens inside each of the participants of the session. Perhaps the obvious properties of the central object of discussion stand out from the background and ‘pull’ the patterns/archetypes from the collective subconscious memory. We are taught that at the subconscious level, we are all somehow connected. But I don’t really understand how I can observe this kind of connectedness, before experiencing this kind of phenomenon and related synchronicities which usually happen in the days following gestalt sessions.

It has been my participation in, and occasional leading of, this kind of organized gestalt session that has led me to the idea that an out-of-gestalt setting (e.g. family meal) could resemble such gestalt sessions, with two small differences: a) members do not know they’re participating in a gestalt session, b) the food on the table takes the role of the central drawing.

What are the similarities between gestalt sessions and meals?

1. There are chairs, obviously.

2. There is a group of people sitting in a circle (or square if we have a square table).

3. There is a central object of focus (food or drinks on the table).

4. There are comments about the central object of focus. For me, food is an object of art.

5. There is a companion who leads the conversation. For example:
   a. me as a father in my family, or my wife, or,
   b. my mother-in-law, when we dine at my wife’s parents.

6. It is easier to start the conversation about the central object (“How’s the food?”) than about the person (“How are your grades?” or “How’s your Parkinson’s developing?”).

7. The conversation about the food takes place here and now, therefore we can treat the conversation about the food as a reflection of our here-and-now feelings and emotional state.

8. If there is tension within a person, and he is unwilling to express it directly, he will express it in a form of ‘food talk’. For example, he won’t eat or will have negative comments about the food.

There are important differences too. Within the group gestalt sessions as I experienced them:

1. people know they’re participating in the gestalt session (meals are considered as harmless gatherings),

2. people voluntarily participate in gestalt sessions (sometimes not true for the meals, especially for kids),

3. there is a safe environment where you can open up more easily (meal is often a place of tension),

4. the conversation usually moves from indirect (about the art object) to more
concrete,
5. the art objects in a gestalt session are used to reveal something, not to hide it (as in food talk, where people are not aware that they are talking about relations when they talk about food),
6. there is a guide, a companion, who moves the session forward (food talks are sometimes stuck and nobody's willing to push them forward).

Does this make any sense? Yes and no. If yes, then any random event that includes people can be treated as a gestalt session. If no, nothing can be treated as a gestalt session. It's up to us to decide.

I haven't figured out the details of how to fully draw the analogy between sitting down to have a meal with a group and participating in a gestalt session, but the feeling is right. Although there are many important differences, I can say at least that the meal is a primitive form of more advanced gestalt sessions. We get the chance to ask our fellow meal participants about the food and observe their interactions with it. How does it taste or smell? Does the taste remind them of some specific event? Have they already read Proust and why not? Do they leave something on the plate? Do they lick the plate? Do they group the food, so the different foods don't touch? Do they comment on it? Smell it before they put it in the mouth? Secretly hide the canapes in their bags? Use the other side of the fork for spreading?

We can observe the words too. Negative comments about the food might show our uneasiness with the person who prepared the food or about the inner state of the person who expressed the negativity. Positive comments about the food might show our relations to the person who prepared the food are good. Or, that the inner state of the person who makes the comment is calm. In addition, if a person rejects a certain type of food (e.g. animal products) this might show he is rejecting certain habits/beliefs of his parents, which can trigger the process of individuation. This is true at least in my case (moral and health related reasons aside). In general, what could be more difficult than rejecting food/food related habits parents gave us? Parents must know what is best for us, right? Not in each case. This is also the reason I put so much importance and focus on it. Because it is a symbolic break-up with ‘the mother’s breast’ which provides life. And if I want to become an individuum, I have to die (symbolically, of course) and re-create myself.

**CONCLUSION**

Talking about food is sometimes all that we have with some people. So maybe if I put myself in the role of gestalt practitioner and decide to be aware during lunch or dinner of the conversations about the food, the figure (words about the food can be seen as words about the relations, inner state of persons or their attitude towards the world) will stand out. Even though people will try to hide their real feelings behind the food talk, they will reveal something about themselves in any case. If I am not attentive or aware, then the meal is just a meal, a background, and no figure will emerge. So, if I'm not attentive to the food talk, I will miss the opportunity to gain the insight into my family's relations and the emotional states of its members. In other words, I miss out on gaining a better understanding of my relations with others and maybe even the possibility of changing...
the relations.

Lastly, I can say that the food that we eat might be a representation of ‘fleshed’, tangible love; (“... and the bread became the flesh of the God ...”).

I must leave now. I smell my wife is preparing a delicious pasta dish with mushrooms, silky tofu, roasted chickpeas and tomatoes on a rucola and cress sprouts bed. Nothing remotely as tasteful and tasty as her culinary masterpieces can be found in any restaurant.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Mateja, Dawn, Mojca, Deirdre, Amanda, and Lukasz for being here and for the first readings, for triggering the writing in the first place, for pushing it forward, for their warm support, for diving deep into the content, for proofreading, for being merciless where needed and for being a part of the gestalt writing support group.\textsuperscript{11}

NOTES & REFERENCES

1. In my gestalt training, there were almost no empty chair sessions. So it must be a stubborn myth or urban legend.

2. Repeating patterns of behaviour which always bring the same outcome, not productive, but bring the rewards that calm us because of introjects; “Kick me”, “Yes, but...”, “Do something for me...”, E. Berne (1964), \textit{Games People Play}

3. Don’t worry, I like to play games too. Especially I like to play 'look how hard I’ve tried.'

4. Another interesting observation: the days after putting it on paper, the situation improved. Is this a result of being aware of it (by writing about it), and consequently it resolved by itself?

5. Freud would have had something to say about that sentence, wouldn’t he?

6. \url{www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_H%C3%B6fer_Gestaltpedagogik}

7. Registered as EU patent no. 003751757

8. You can see some examples of gestalt sessions and artefacts here (in Slovenian language): \url{www.gestaltpedagogika.rkc.si}

9. M. Proust, \textit{In search of lost time / Swann’s way}

10. Irena Jurjevic, Eating as emotional language, \textit{New Gestalt Voices, Vol 1.}

11. NGV Writing Support Group, \url{www.facebook.com/groups/ngvwrittingsupport}

Tomi Rozman completed an integrative gestalt pedagogics course in Ljubljana, in 2015. Currently he is pursuing the next level of training - gestalt counselling. He applies gestalt principles to married couples’ groups and youngsters. In his main career, he works in a very different field - having completed his PhD in computer science and informatics in 2007, he runs his own consulting company. Tomi lives in Slovenia with his wife and three children. He loves travelling, reading, hiking, playing guitar and ukulele. tomi.rozman@gmail.com
SHAME:
APPROACHING THIS Crippling experience through the psychotherapeutic lens of Gestalt

by Katerina Papathanasiou

Before identifying shame as the central theme of this article, I had wandered into its various aspects, continuing to avoid naming it. Whichever way I went, I always ended up there. The structure of the self, the pathology of the self, parental practice, personality formation, the difficulty in the healing process, the therapist's difficulty and feelings of inadequacy, are just a few of the subjects I had been thinking about. So I decided to look directly at the issue of shame, to stop circling around it and to start talking about the vicious circles of my life.

From a very early age I was ashamed. I was ashamed of my thoughts, of my feelings, of my body, of who I am, of what I am. I was ashamed of my existence as a whole. I was never enough, I was never accepted. I felt a constant insecurity that if I showed my true self, my family would reject me. Without realizing it, I had chosen to live in a prison where, instead of growing up and developing, I was diminishing. I felt that if I was good and did what I was told, I would be allowed to belong. Any violation of the rules of the system was met with obvious disapproval and coldness.

Most of my childhood memories are accompanied by a sense of inadequacy and a huge emotional deficit. In my efforts to fill the gap, I would end up attacking/punishing myself. I looked for relief in food but all I found was further frustration as the need for contact and warmth was not met. This caused me to feel more shame about my lack of discipline. “They were right to tell me that I deserve nothing, that I do nothing.”

Initially, I was embarrassed only to myself, protected in my loneliness. As I grew up, I got my own family, made friends and fought for my relationships. I generously gave love and care. I did not want to deprive those around me of what I had been deprived of and what had caused me so much suffering. However, all my relationships were burdened by the fear of non-acceptance. I had to be
perfect, to do it all perfectly. I invested in my relationships, but I could not enjoy them because I wasn’t true to myself or the people I tried to relate to.

Gradually, through a very slow and painful process, my view began to clear. I started enjoying acceptance, love, and warmth in other people who appreciated me, not for what I was doing, but for who I was. I began to diversify, but I still felt a strong pull back to the original system, looking for confirmation which was not forthcoming. I was always in the care of the system, but never in the 'right' way. I was always wrong, constantly stumbling, until I came to such a deep personal impasse that I could no longer do anything else but face things honestly. I hoped that the system would not expel me, but keep me. But hope had collapsed, the system kept rejecting me, thus my true self was born in the ruins of this consciousness. I changed my career, leaving behind dentistry, a choice motivated by the aspirations of others, and I followed my dream.

This is how I started my journey to the science of psychology, first of all to cure me, and then to relieve the human pain with which I had such a deep relationship. I worked a lot. I entered a battle that was exhausting and at the same time enlightened with moments of authentic happiness. I worked on claiming both the studies and the relationships that had a deep meaning for me. My personal and group therapy was a great help to me, as were the people who believed in me, even in times when I had no faith in myself.

I have not stopped being ashamed, but now I do not sink into it and I continue to believe in myself, even when something is wrong. I love more and I live my life with people who love me and accept me as I am. I have a clear picture of how I can relate to each person individually. I have accepted that not all people have the same readiness for meaningful contact and closeness; some cannot or do not want it. Others make a different choice, as I did. I decided to stay in touch with myself and others, even when I’m ashamed, even when I'm afraid, even when I'm not perfect.

**AIM**

The aim of this article is to provide a basic theoretical framework of shame and to describe eight techniques that I have used with clients where the issue of shame was the main focus of our work.

**THE DEFINITION AND DIFFERENT TYPES OF SHAME**

Shame is a multidimensional experience. It is an individual phenomenon that is experienced in some way and to some extent by every person, while at the same time being a familial, intergenerational and cultural phenomenon. For this reason, there are many differences in the predisposition of people to shame, depending on their gender, the culture they belong to, their religion, age, ability, etc. (e.g., Franzoi, 2006; Gough & McFadden, 2001; Schaefer, 2006; Yontef, 1993).

One type or use of shame that can be distinguished initially is ontological shame, which is the shame associated with being human and finding yourself limited and mortal (Bradshaw, 2005; Hans, 1991 as cited in Pattison, 2000). Another distinct type of shame is the so-called normal or healthy
shame (Scheff, 1997). Healthy shame is a feeling that teaches us our limits and motivates us to realize our needs (Bradshaw, 2005). It seems that most if not all people experience shame in some circumstances as both normal and functional. Sometimes this kind of shame is relevant to the sense of owing or showing respect (Schneider, 1987a) and helps us set and maintain respect for both ourselves and others. This kind of shame often does not require eradication or relief, because it helps us maintain social order and relationships.

But what if the feeling of shame occupies the whole personality? In these instances, instead of feeling that he/she is less talented and attractive than someone else, the person comes to believe that his/her whole self is essentially flawed. Shame then becomes toxic and can lead an individual to one of the most destructive emotional illnesses he/she can experience. Internalized toxic shame works like bad cholesterol, and if it remains untreated, it can eventually kill us as it deprives our lives of joy (Bradshaw, 2005).

Another differentiation is between acute and chronic shame. While acute shame is short-lived and can be highly functional as a warning or a medium of communication between oneself and others, chronic shame may be very dysfunctional in many ways, both for individuals and for the societies that they live in. Finally, a useful distinction is between social and psychological shame. All shame is born within a social context and is socially shaped, but there is a difference between shame that is perceived as an objective social state and that which constitutes an individual psychological feeling (Pattison, 2000).

THE INDIVIDUALISTIC VIEW OF SHAME AS OPPOSED TO ITS RELATIONAL VIEW

The personalized detached self is the focus of the individualistic perspective, which is essentially a shameful view, with shame at the core of our experience. According to the individualistic view, health and growth consists of handling, refuting, and compensating for the shame that works in the background. However, this balance might easily collapse at any moment, to non-compensation, breakdown and terror. A useful challenge to this model of self can be found in the work of Goodman (1964; 1994 as cited in Lee & Wheeler, 2008), where the self-field experience is developed and processed as one. In the field model, this is the exact definition of shame “the unacceptability of the personal self of needs and characteristics and desires in the social field where the integrative self-process is trying to take place” (Lee & Wheeler, 2008, p. 48).

THE TREATMENT OF SHAME FOLLOWS THE RELATIONAL PATH

As a relational phenomenon, shame is a regulator of many social interactions. Therefore, we can understand it better through the lens of a relational psychological field. Gestalt theory has been addressing the phenomenon of shame for a long time, though often without making a specific reference to it (e.g., Clarkson, 2004; Lee, 1994a; 1995 as cited in Lee & Wheeler, 2008; Kaufman, 1992). At a more general level, the therapeutic goals of gestalt therapy are the same, whether or not it contains work with shame. The therapist's task is to recognize the client's primary experience of contact between organism and environment, to act in light of this recognition and to have faith that
development will eventually come as a result of this contact. The objective in the work with shame is to enhance awareness of the power one has over the process of shame.

**THERAPEUTIC JOURNEY**

At the beginning of the therapeutic journey, many clients may be aware of some manifestations of their shame but they lack awareness of the core processes beneath these negative attitudes, as well as the vocabulary to express themselves on this subject. Gradually, through a very slow process, the existence of shame passes from the client's background to his/her foreground awareness. These are some of the approaches I have used in my therapy with clients.

**SHAME IN THE HERE-AND-NOW**

When clients understand and can recognize their shame reaction, they are more likely to understand what it is in the field that has triggered this reaction. By keeping the client in the here-and-now, the therapist gives him/her the opportunity to experience both his/her present and his/her past in present time (O'Leary, 1995). As Perls (1976 as cited in O'Leary, 1995, p. 90) advocates, "A person can only close the book with his/her old problems in the present." It is important for the client to be familiar with the sensory, cognitive and emotional aspects of his/her reaction to shame. Being aware of the physical manifestations of shame is a way of becoming attentive, rather than following a habitual reaction; for instance, identifying a particular intensity, a stiff chest, a contraction of the eyes, a blush, and a plethora of other sensations as bodily manifestations of shame. An individual might first recognize the feeling of shame through his/her body reactions and then associate them with the emotional and cognitive part. The cognitive components include dysfunctional thinking that he/she is not enough, worthless, insufficient, as well as constantly comparing him/herself with other persons or with ideal images of the self, etc. This self-denial or loathing of oneself coexists with the instinct to quit, to remain quiet, to vanish, to be small (Yontef, 1993).

**THE BIRTH OF SHAME: DEVELOPMENTAL WORK WITH SHAME**

The study of how this process begins in early childhood experiences and in the individual's important relationships, especially within his/her family, is an essential part of gestalt work with shame. The therapist brings awareness to the client's early shame processes, using the past as a background for understanding shame in the present, without explicitly stating this. It is very important during therapy that the client recognizes and closes the unfinished business of the past in order to discharge the emotional energy trapped in retroflection (Yontef, 1993). Finally, it is essential for the client to have the chance within therapy to relive and then either incorporate or eliminate the inherited parental figures and values that he/she is carrying from his childhood. Working with developmental material in this way is not new to gestalt therapy, and many issues are treated in a similar way (Mann, 2010; O'Leary, 1995; Polster & Polster, 1973; Yontef, 1993).

**THE MODEL OF THE POSITIVE PARENT**

Through specific experiments and exercises, the client can realize essential aspects that were absent from his/her childhood. One
such experiment is ‘the metaphorically good parent’, which was introduced by Yontef (1993) and consists of a series of three exercises. Firstly, the client is invited to portray an ideal parent by putting him/her in the ‘empty chair’, making his/her figure as clear as possible, and then engaging in dialogue with him/her. Secondly, the therapist takes the role of the ideal parent, saying the phrase “I love you just the way you are, I will always be there for you”. The phenomenological work focuses on the client’s reaction (Yontef, 1993, p. 523). Thirdly, when the client can get something from the previous process, he/she is invited to play the metaphorically good parent him/herself. This can be very difficult for a client who is unable to accept the message of a good parent because of shame.

HH remembered all her life experiencing harsh rejection from her mother and the difficulty that this unbearable feeling brought to her life was the reason that she came to therapy.

During the second year of the healing process, when the therapeutic relationship had been established and she had achieved a degree of self-support, she accepted my invitation to enter into a fantasy dialogue with her mother. I took the role of a mother, a mother very different from what she had lived with. I listened to her with understanding, I justified her feelings, remained open to communication throughout the discussion and accepted her just as she was.

At some point HH looked in my eyes and with a trembling voice she declared her homosexual identity. Her homosexuality had been the cause of a definitive rupture in the relationship with her mother and the main source of her shame. Being able to look at another human being in the eye, describing herself just as she is and not hearing criticism, was for her an unprecedented experience. For the first time she recognized a different image, one that wasn’t distorted by the deforming mirrors she had come to believe in. She found recognition from another person and she recognized herself.

I was looking at her and I felt that I was embracing at the same time the infant, the child, the teenager, and the woman. She looked at me and I felt her growing up, evolving. Her body began to unfold, she abandoned the curved shape she always held, her shoulders leaned back in the chair, and she deeply inhaled a new sense of self. Her mother had never accepted her homosexuality. But HH had accepted herself and now she was free to get in contact with other people who accepted and loved her, not ignoring who she was, but exactly for what she was: a unique human being.

CONTACT EXPERIMENTS

Perls and colleagues (1951) believed that the majority of people had essentially lost contact with their bodily senses, and that the therapist’s encouragement to become aware of their body can cause stress in clients who have shame issues. A client bewildered by shame usually has a problem with receiving positive feedback or hugs from other people, even if, or perhaps especially if, these are honest, earned or desirable.

An aspect of contact work is to encourage the client to recognize positive hugs, friendly touches, caresses, and to recognize that they are honestly given and received. This means allowing him/herself to feel warm, safe, and therefore able to enjoy the unexpected good things that he/she is being given (Yontef, 1993).
LM participated in a therapeutic group aimed at self-awareness and making contact with the authentic self. The group relied on movement and physical contact as a means of communication, and the members refrained from sharing personal information verbatim until a few meetings before the end. Before this point they only knew each other’s first names and the primary communication tool was the body.

LM took the brave decision to participate in this group, precisely because she had difficulty with physical contact. Her body was like a stranger to her; she felt uncomfortable in it, rejected it. The touch of others caused her a lot of distress. Despite this, she was always present at the meetings, handling a bigger risk each time at her own pace. With me, she had a relationship of trust, and the fact that I never pressed her to do something that she was not ready to do was very therapeutic for her.

At the penultimate meeting of the group, she accepted my proposal to participate, to star, in essence, in an experiment. The invitation was to sit in the centre of the group, with her eyes closed and to allow the others to touch her. In permitting herself to feel human touch, she would break the energy grid she had so meticulously created around her to keep others away. With her eyes tightly closed, and with difficulty in breathing from time to time, she remained in contact with the sound of my voice and the sense of my hand in her palm, which held her throughout the whole experimental process.

All the members of the group touched her with courtesy, some with a light touch, others with a soft embrace. At one point, following my advice, LM opened her eyes. At the sight of the group, her eyes flooded with tears, but her breathing calmed down and she received a second round of hugs, this time with her eyes wide open. It was as if the eyes of her soul had opened and for the first time she was embracing a friendly and warm world, in whose arms she was welcomed.

**FOCUS ON THE COGNITIVE**

In this section, cognitive-behavioral therapy unites with gestalt therapy, bringing the client’s pattern of thinking about shame into the spotlight and redefining it within a less automatic and dysfunctional context (Hawton et al., 2008; Yontef, 1993).

PM was trapped in a continuous negative inner dialogue, sometimes strong and sometimes silent. Every break in her achievements, every negative comment, every change in her extreme programming, led her to a torturous one-way street: “You are unworthy, you have failed again, you cannot plan anything, you will always be like that, you will be wasting your life, you should be ashamed of your downfall.” Each time it felt like an internal explosion.

Gradually, PM’s dysfunctional thoughts came to the forefront, where their triggers were recognized and recorded. PM learned to recognize the precursors of the negative dialogue and to pause, using her breathing in a psycho-prophylactic way. The idea was not to engage in the negative dialogue by recognizing the automatic processes at play. Before allowing herself to follow the negative dialogue, she paused to take three deep inhalations, breathing in a positive thought each time, and then made three equally exhilarating exhalations, expelling a negative thought each time.

If I had prohibited her from engaging in a
negative dialogue, this would have been replacing one introjection with another, creating a different compulsion and invoking shame each time she could not comply. Without the shadow of this negative goal, PM started to delay the negative dialogue. As the delay grew longer, more space was given to positive thoughts, and the introjected voices began to lose their intensity.

THE DANCE OF SHAME

Shame can be understood as a dance, embracing the polarities of shrinkage and extension. At one pole of shame, we encounter reduction, withdrawal, smallness and silence. Inevitably, this can turn into a dance of reduced motion or sound or even absolute stagnation, possibly becoming a devastating spiritual experience.

At the other end of the dance experience, there is expansion. The client can move with a raised chest and a head facing upwards, while claiming his/her own space and making solid ground connections. The realization of the existence of these two poles, and the ability to move back and forth along the continuum in-between, gives the client not only a sense of movement instead of stillness, but also the gift of embracing shame as a temporary feeling and not as a permanent defect.

People who were not touched when they were young have great difficulty with free movement, and people with shame usually have a childhood history where there was insufficient touch, especially during the very fragile moments of infancy. Touching, bodies, emotions, and senses were labelled as revolting and their value was not seen.

While movement and touch are challenges for the shameful client, they have excellent therapeutic and developmental strength. Planned experiments and work at home, similar to those used in the treatment of sexual problems (for example, the gradual rediscovery of physical sensation through the touch of another person), can lead to contact with the senses and the client's empowerment. (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1988; Yontef, 1993).

THE IMPECCABLE FROZEN FACE

A person conquered by shame has an enormous need to hide. Within a therapeutic encounter it is important to recognize this and create a safe place where the client can experiment with it, expressing it both physically and verbally. Allowing someone to experiment with hiding, particularly within a group, might significantly reduce the instinctive need to hide. It can help to unravel early childhood memories which can then be expressed and dealt with.

Hiding can also be achieved behind a frozen face, a mask. A client can cover his/her face with his/her own mask, which he/she creates, and then try to make contact through it. Not being visible seems to help people who need it, enabling them to leave aside their apprehension and shame. Such an experimental process can bring to awareness those attributes of shame which concern the issue of remaining out of sight, the intensity of direct contact and the need for hiding (Brownell, 2010; Clarkson, 2004; Hycner & Jacobs, 1995; Joyce & Sills, 2010; Yontef, 1993).

PO was flooded with shame. In the first year of therapy he avoided eye contact either by looking
at the carpet or looking up at a corner of the ceiling. The lack of eye contact often followed the lack of verbal contact, with PO sinking into his thoughts and personal introspection.

Six months after the onset of therapy, and having acquired a trusting relationship based on acceptance, PO made his own mask and was relieved, admitting that he was using it anyway in all his social contacts. Hiding behind the mask, he lifted up his head and began to keep his body in a more open yet rigid attitude. The dialogue became easier, and as the process gained in flow, he shared his experience, his difficulty, and the shame that accompanied him from his teenage years (when the need for the mask was born).

As the sessions rolled on and the need for the mask remained, his breathing began to sound heavier, something that I mentioned to him and which gradually came to his awareness. When asked if anything was needed, he always answered that he was having difficulty, but felt safe. At one point I asked him if I could touch his face, over the mask, and he accepted it. I heard him breathing heavily and a little later he took off the mask while looking at me and told me that it was no longer enough to look at me through the mask; he felt that our contact was so limited. "Sterilized" was the word he used - safe but tasteless.

Now he still experiences feelings of shame, but he is able to stay in touch with me while shame is present. He has never been asked to give it up. The goal is just to recognize it. The mask stays in a drawer in my office. He put it there himself and he is well aware that he is not forbidden to use it if he feels the need. Eighteen months later, the need has not arisen again.

THE IDEAL SELF, THIS CRUEL JUDGE

The ideal self is actually a self-image of how one wants to be and feel, or how one needs to be, in order to be acceptable. The ideal image is often more assimilated and egosyntonic than simple introjections. Shame-oriented people compare themselves with this ideal self, and identify more with the ideal than the real experience of themselves. They feel shame whenever they do not identify with the ideal image. It is especially ironic later in therapy, when clients experiment phenomenologically with becoming this ideal self, that often they find they do not like what they are doing. Comparison with the ideal self is a great part of the healing process of shame (Dryden, 2007; Lee & Wheeler, 2008; Mann, 2010; Polster & Polster, 1973; Yontef, 1993).

Sitting in the opposite chair, my ideal self was handsome, impeccable, successful, and confident. I imagined my ideal self as utopian and I looked at him with jealousy as he looked back at me with arrogance.

When my therapist invited me to take the place of my ideal self in order to feel his energy, I got up shakily from my position. As I sat down, I felt a frostiness and I almost nostalgically looked back towards the position of my weak and incomplete self. In the position of the ideal self, I recognized the difficulty of perfection. The cost that someone is called on to pay in order to be perfect. Endless struggle and impasse. Need for reinforcement and superficial relationships. Who can relate to such inexorable perfection that emphasizes excellence, and in doing so unwittingly makes others look small?

When I returned to the chair of my incomplete self, I felt a familiar warmth. This creature
was incomplete but had unique qualities. I defended his position, but without renouncing my ideal, since some of his qualities have things in common with the imperfect one; I need them and they are part of my identity. What I did not need was his critical attitude, because then, instead of realizing my strength, I was minimizing and immobilizing myself. Additionally, the ideal self needed me to be able to relax when the struggle for perfection led him to exhaustion. At the meeting of these two worlds I could get in touch with my authentic self.

CONCLUSION

Shame is a challenge for every therapist and the work with it is both energy-consuming and rewarding. In my private practice, I try to address shame in many ways, starting with the way my office is laid out. Together with a colleague of mine with whom I share the office, we have a place where a client can be protected if he/she does not wish to be seen. However, there is also an open waiting room where clients might meet as they come in or leave. We always offer a choice, but gradually I have reached some conclusions. Only a few really distressed clients do not want to meet other people, and as they progress through their therapy they gradually become daring enough to enter the waiting room in confidence.

Once, I came out of my office having ended a session and I saw one client soothing another, who was there for the first time. They were talking, laughing and the atmosphere was genuinely relaxed. It was a moment of sheer happiness for me. This is a dream I have regarding psychotherapy. I long for the moment that we as therapists don't nurture secrecy, so that psychotherapy will come out of the shadows and people will talk about their therapy, the same way they talk about their visit to the dentist.

I will never forget the look on each of my clients' faces when they see me for the first time - discreet, scared, eyes moist from the moment's emotion. They often remind me of my children's eyes when they seek to meet my own to calm down, to feel safe, to feel accepted and dear. These moments of authentic human encounter are the reason I am glad to have the honour of meeting people and building together unique relationships.

REFERENCES


---

**Katerina Papathanasiou** is a gestalt therapist and psychologist working in private practice in Thessaloniki, Greece. At first she studied dentistry, and then later, psychology, which has always been the main focus of her interest. Katerina's interests include loss, trauma, shame and eating disorders. She gives lectures and runs various seminars and workshops.

katerinapapathanasiou678@gmail.com
[one zero]

by Ján Ballx

absence of absence is symmetrical
such wrapping
beauty

soothing loving affirmation
absence of subject is present
1 0 object

mutually without
touch is pure
between

softness of touch
we are in
one

everything is nothing
summed totality is
zero

togetherness is
on1y
one 0
beginning leads to here
  it is growing and
  maturing

ageing and dying nonexisting
being not here is what is left
  here

mattress is soft
  up and down
  trembling

waving flapping flit
  disappeared
  sides

Decima decides
decimal measures of
  life

ten years of ten numbers
  no parts but
  b u t t e r f l i e s

inhospitable hospitality of host
patience belongs to
  patients

  ray of sun
  the end comes with
  beginning
Ján Ballx is a psychiatrist who has been working in private practice for over ten years, as well as teaching and supervising. His basic psychotherapy training was in gestalt, and this remains most dear to his heart. After graduation from medical school in Brno, Czech Republic, he worked in different psychiatric settings in Slovakia and also in the UK. He was born during Normalisation in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which no longer exists as such. Currently Ján lives, learns, and works in Slovakia. He is also an artist - some of his artwork is displayed below.

ballx@psychoterapia.sk
I tried several times with this article. Each time it started differently. This situation led me nowhere. This morning, when I came to a quiet lake, I realized how greatly the environment influences my thoughts. The negative impact in some settings is so strong that I lose touch with my essence, which affects the meaning and form of the text. So I decided to write an article here, sitting by the side of a lake.

I seek solitude and peace when I want to hear myself and get in touch with my inner world. Any external irritation causes anxiety and makes me defensive, causing my inner world to stay in hiding.

In this article, I would like to describe my experience of dealing with people like me, who are also highly sensitive to the outside world. Beyond that, I would like to share some approaches of how to support oneself in society. Sometimes the outside reality invades and confuses, causing strong emotions and provoking spontaneous defensive reactions. These reactions are similar to the reactions of people with borderline personality disorders, autistic or narcissistic disorders. Noises, smells, voice intonations, conversation topics, an excessive amount of information, people, events, and goings-on - all these make it impossible to remain in contact with yourself.

Highly sensitive people acutely perceive manipulation, hypocrisy, feelings and even sensations of other people. These are people who are sensitive to the beauty of meanings, actions, and intonations. Gracelessness (or unbeauty) hurts them and evokes in them excessive feelings of anguish, horror, shame, and fury. Highly sensitive people perceive their reactions to the world as something wrong when they meet with lack of support, understanding and respect for their feelings. They think that their actions are not appropriate, rather than recognising that the environment does not suit them.

Such thoughts are the consequence of an upbringing in a narcissistic society, where there is a compulsion to meet certain standards of beauty and achievement, and a rejection of everything that manifests
otherwise. In a narcissistic society, individuality does not have the opportunity to come to light and crystalize itself. Therefore, many people are prevented from experiencing their strength, understanding their individuality, finding their own style and rhythm of life, and forming their unique objective reality.

EXPERIENCES OF CLIENTS 1

“When I was fifteen years old, I decided that I would never marry - I could not bear the shame of my parents’ behavior towards my future husband. At that time, they were getting divorced, and I suffered incredibly from their scandals. They never paid attention to me. Their only concern was for my anorexia and regular loss of consciousness. Given half a chance, I left home. But even now I do not feel myself. As if I have not yet been born in this life.”

“I am extremely sensitive to food. I cannot eat while visiting someone’s house or being invited as a guest. The only option in these cases is tea and candies. I can only eat food cooked by me or by those I trust and know that they love me. Otherwise, I can easily poison myself because I feel too strongly the moods and energy of other people. This has always been the case as far back as I can remember. My parents never supported me in this and forced me to eat, maintaining appearances when we were invited to someone’s house. I was always sick after eating such food.”

“In high school, I decided that I would be a killer. I was able to turn off my feelings completely. In this state, my head worked so quickly and clearly that I could solve any problem instantly. I could clearly answer any question, without the slightest hesitation. I dreamed of a military career. Only recently, sensitivity came back to me when I fell in love. Now I am experiencing a new start in life.”

“I remember how the sky was falling down while I waited for my parents from the teacher-parent meeting. Sitting in the corridor, I listened for the entrance sounds. I listened to the noise of the elevator and waited in a cold sweat when the elevator stopped on my floor and I heard their footsteps. Any criticism addressed to me makes me doubt my right to exist. To recover myself I eat. I eat a lot, and then I vomit and again eat.”

“I thoroughly understood my desire to die. I was about fourteen years old and I had dreams where I saw myself in a coffin. Life around was so uninteresting and alien that I did not want to wake up in the morning. I escaped to my paintings and fiction. Secretly from my parents, I would paint overnight - it was my time. In the morning I went to school thoroughly disgusted. I hid my drawings to avoid any irony and tongue-lashing. My hobbies were regarded as stupid by my parents.”

The formation of hypersensitivity is influenced both by existing qualities of feeling in the world (in my family, grandfather and uncle were artists, and grandmother was a fashion designer), and the influence of emotional, mental and physical violence from the outside.

EXPERIENCES OF CLIENTS 2

“I remember hiding all my drawings and diaries from my mother, afraid of her teasing. I should have thought that all my hobbies were nonsense.”

“My father brutally beat me for any actions that did not meet with his expectations.”
“In my childhood, I sang. The vocal teacher offered me a place in a music school, with a view to building a career. But my father was totally against this. For him, singing was not a serious profession for earning money. I stopped singing. I studied to be an economist.”

“I liked one boy in the neighborhood. I was about five years old, and he was a year older. We spent time together. I remember the grinning glances of my grandmother and her condescending words “So what, do you want to marry?” I was extremely ashamed.”

When I meet such people, I recognize them immediately. They are able to feel the slightest vibrations of emotions, catching the senses around them. They perceive all feelings, mimicry, and intonation automatically, in a quick glance. They are like parabolic antennas, tuned to scan the outside world. Many of them have allergic reactions not only to food or the environment but also to the actions of others. They often consider themselves as deviant and unadapted to reality. Such sensitivity and susceptibility is a problem of modern culture, especially in megacities.

Highly sensitive people are afraid of hurting others with their actions because causing inconvenience to another feels as though they are damaging themselves. Since the emotional threshold is different, the environment simply cannot understand the sufferings of a highly sensitive person. It looks as though they have blood of a green color, instead of the usual red. When others see it, they do not understand that they are in fact the same. Therefore, such people prefer to minimize contact. It is difficult for them to work in open space offices or to build close relationships. They choose workplaces with minimized contact, or where they can manage their own projects. Even the smallest dose of violence is perceived by them as an allergen, provoking protective reactions.

For many years I tried to change my attitude and become less sensitive to non-beauty (to realistic imperfections and pragmatism) of the world. My vulnerability and ability to notice emotions being 'up in the air' made me suffer during my office hours and among people who are not as sensitive to the world as I am. I tried to force myself to come out and 'be like everyone else', but panic and the will to escape were stronger than financial ambitions, despite all the advantages that they promised.

At a tender age, all children are very sensitive to the outside world. This is a feature of human nature. At four or five years old children reveal their inner worlds. Most children at this age have a favorite teddy-bear to whom they tell all their sorrows and secrets. If an adult does not appear beside him, becoming a guide to the wider world and supporting his self-expression, dissociation occurs under unfavorable conditions. The inner world of a child remains hidden inside without the power and knowledge to manifest it outwardly. Children become adults, but their inner world cannot be fully shown in human society. Sometimes energy coming from the inside breaks through to the outside, but usually it happens unconsciously and can be devastating for the person, his environment, and his relationships. This is perceived as a pathological manifestation.

To protect their individuality, some people go 'widthways' building empires and institutions in the material world or working to develop
high status. Then it is hard to reach them emotionally. Some go 'depthward' into reasoning, analysis, and explanations. It seems to me that many psychologists use this path to find behavioral interpretations, viewing internal crises through this lens. Another group of people leans toward anabiosis. Their emotional life seems to freeze, waiting for better times. Anesthesia protects against excessive pain by disabling the senses, although from outside these people can seem almost unaffected. Others live in imagination (or in virtual reality) and experience their aerial fancies, creating their own worlds and fantastic spaces. In order to save themselves, these people learn to hide their inner world from others, showing only their strengths.

Bulimia, anorexia, alexithymia, drug addiction, games addiction, overeating and many other disorders are the consequence of the inability to be oneself. These are ways to tune out the pain that comes from interacting with the environment. There are also more socialized ways of placing the beauty of your inner world in society, such as writing poems, prose, pictures, caring for homeless animals, charity, etc.

The fear of being blamed, feeling ashamed, or rejected forces people to maintain their dissociation. I avoid those fears by asking my highly sensitive clients to imagine that they have had a breakdown. How would they look then? How would they live? Where? What would they do?

**FANTASIES OF CLIENTS**

“I would be a wandering philosopher. I would walkabout among people and talk to them about everything.”

“I would live in a forest and always have contact with the wind, trees, and clouds. I would not feel alone, but in contact with the nature.”

“I would be a street person. I would not worry about anything and do whatever I want - go to the city center or into the woods. I would sleep on the bench in the park. During the daytime, I would sit on flower beds and sniff flowers.”

“I would definitely dance. Everywhere and whenever I would like to.”

“I would be an urban fool. I would have many dogs. I would pick them up on the street and take them to my one-bedroom apartment. All day we would wander around the city and the surrounding area in search of food or just walking.”

“I would live on the outskirts in a small house made of colorful bottles. The sun would penetrate through the glass walls, and I would always be happy with this beauty. I would have a small greenhouse and a neglected garden, and I would surely sing. Always.”

These fantasies give us a sense of freedom from limitations and bring us closer to our nature. They help us to consider our talents, rhythms, dreams and beauty. These fantasies can become stable islands where you can relax and be at one with yourself and selfhood any time. These islands can be expanded, planted with flowers and trees, inhabited by living beings. In reality, it is the gradual formation of one's own surroundings (favorite places, activities, people with whom one feels comfortable, etc.), which can gradually be introduced in everyday life. It is one thing when you enter the 'alien world' alone, and something very different when you have your own universe with you. Even if
it is very small.

Highly sensitive people are always in search of their 'nest', to be shared with people who can offer support and to whom they can show their rich inner world. In this contact with each other, they have the freedom to be themselves and to give birth to amazing thoughts and ideas.

Many highly sensitive people have difficulties in career advancement. The societal pressures prevent them from realizing their talents, capacities, and aspirations, and they lose themselves in the environment of realism.

For those searching for a meaningful career I can offer an experiment with lifelines (the experiment was proposed by my colleague Aralia Kochanovskaya). I propose drawing a lifeline and remembering what you loved to do from the earliest years to the present day. All these memories should be written down explicitly along the line, as well as the dreams that were present at various times. Then I invite drawing another lifeline on another sheet of paper, indicating the actual events and types of activity that took place. Comparing these two lines, you can find the place where your dream was lost.

If we find the moments where dreams were lost, we can create opportunities to restore our vision of self-realization and seek ways to achieve it. Often this happens through creativity, a change of workplace, or sometimes through changing one's location or country of residence to one that corresponds more to one's natural sensitivity.

Children intuitively sense the activities that can facilitate and help convey their mental sufferings and inner beauty. What they love to do at an early age is curative for them. It is important for parents to notice and help their children develop their hobbies. This will aid both professional realization and development of personality.

I would like to illustrate with a young woman's story. She came to see me because she suspected that she was mentally ill. She was a social worker in a successful public organization. Communication with strangers terrified her, but in spite of this she forced herself to lead business negotiations. She was almost always tired, with an elevated body temperature, although all tests showed that she was healthy.

She grew up in a family where tender and caring relationships were not accepted. From an early age, she was forced to take care of herself - went to school, visited the doctor, and cooked food. She chose higher education with free tuition. Horrors and panic tormented her from school days, and she turned to drug use in an attempt to find solace, but this only aggravated her mental anguish. Here is her story at one of the first sessions:

“In my fantasies, I live several parallel lives at the same time. Each of them is inhabited by its own creatures and has its own history. When there is time - I go into every one of these lives and put things in order. How do I unite them into one? Is it worth it? Maybe I do not know how to live one life? Or maybe I am not normal?”

We practised different methods - phenomenology, corporeity, and grounding. At one of the sessions, I invited her to try a futuropractical experiment - imagining...
herself in five years. She became confused when she found herself singing in the street. After that session, something began to change in her life. She bought a guitar, wrote a few songs and signed up with a vocal studio. During the nights she began to construct simple web pages, presenting them to friends for free.

She resigned from her job, even though she was very scared of the financial difficulties this caused. For two months, she served out her notice at work, and in the evenings and on weekends she learned about web development and design. Later she was invited to work for the company as a programmer. Her parallel lives gradually ceased to exist. I remember her distress at losing these worlds, but at the same time, her current reality acquired more joyful and pleasant colors.

CONCLUSION

From my experience and perceptions, the material narcissistic society reality is slowly being replaced by a romantic era with depressive inclinations. Spiritual beauty begins to rule people who are driven to despair by fear of poverty, condemnation and expectations. Human souls are wounded by unaesthetic rationalism. Many, many of my clients, like me, are in quest of their beauty, looking for forms to express their emotions and intentionality. Unexpectedly, they begin writing poems and novels, drawing pictures and handcrafting beautiful things, and in many other creative ways building relationships with themselves and others. Their relationships become enriched with more sensuality and warmth of human contact.

Self-acceptance, individuality, inner aesthetics and discovering eco-friendly styles of self-expression in the environment are the ways to co-exist with other people. This is the foundation for the next phase of evolution. I tend to regard psychological deviations in the behavior of people as an evolution of the beauty of human nature, and not as pathology.

“Beauty is life when life unveils her holy face. But you are life and you are the veil. Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror. But you are eternity and you are the mirror.”

~ The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran

Olena Zozulya is a gestalt therapist, coach, poet and artist in Ukraine. She lives in the suburbs of Kiev, and works as a coach at Kiev Institute of Gestalt and Psychodrama, where she teaches therapy and coaching. Olena loves working with spontaneity, individuality, creativity, physicality, esthetics of contact and self-realization. When she's in the mood, she writes poems and points. She loves to travel, dream, create, and just to live!

zozulyaom@gmail.com
Pushing and boundaries: in the forefront of the news. Brexit. Defending boundaries and borders. Pushing out ‘the other’, as well as a strong push back against this policy. The Windrush scandal. Citizens being pushed out of the UK, or having to prove their right to remain, and a public outcry and a push back against this bureaucratic debacle. The pushiest US president ever, certainly in my lifetime. Pushing the executive branch of the government to its very limits. Pushing against anything that gets in his way.

How does this state of affairs relate to my work with clients? Trump’s extreme form of pushiness hasn’t shown up in my therapy room so far, perhaps because his style of narcissism is antithetical to therapy. So how does pushiness turn up in therapy? What is the value and purpose of our ability to push? In my practice, instead of outward pushiness, many of my clients retroreflect their push, holding it in place with introjects such as ‘I must be nice. I must be helpful and put others first’. Of course, it’s not possible to completely reject some attitude or behaviour that we don’t like, such as our pushiness, it will just take up residence in the shadow-land of projections and transference, showing up in unexpected ways:

“Until one can become aware of what one’s aggressive impulses are and learn to put them to constructive use, they are certain to be misused” (PHG, 1951/1972:149)

Or in more contemporary gestalt terminology, what we reject will show up in the actions arising from enduring relational themes, or ERTs (Jacobs, 2017a, 2017b). When I uncover and develop my client’s introject, the ERT appears as something like, ‘I don’t want to push back because I am afraid I will hurt you’, or ‘If I push back you won’t love me, I will be rejected, no one will pay attention’, etc. Underpinning the ERT are various distorted core beliefs such as ‘I am not important. I am not good enough. I am bad. I don’t exist’.

The question I’d like to explore in this article...
is what can support a healthy and effective push at the contact boundary, a push that can lead to empowerment and action in the wider world? Different scenarios come to mind, primarily from my work with clients, and these will form the basis of my article. The question itself didn't emerge from work with a client, but in response to a recent interaction with a friend, someone I hadn't had contact with for at least 10 years. I begin my article with some of the back-and-forth exchange from that conversation.

**SCENARIO 1: ON THE RECEIVING END OF PUSHEINESS**

*Me:* I'm exhausted. A new project is taking up so much time and energy.

*X:* You need to adjust the balance, you're giving too much.

*Me:* I'm not interested in having more Facebook presence, I just belong to a few groups.

*X:* You should try it. You'd like it. It's great to use on holiday.

*Me:* I'm not much of a traveller.

*X:* Really? You should travel more. I'm intuitive and I see that in you.

*X:* You have a transpersonal side. I can see you becoming a priest.

*X:* You would make a great homeopath – it's such a holistic approach.

*X:* You should write a book.

Enough already! So much advice being pushed towards me feels like a real boundary invasion, like arrows are being fired in my direction, and where is my shield, my defence? Do I have more choice in this situation? I come from a family of advice-givers, holders of strong opinions who think they know what is best for others. Over a lifetime I've learned to avoid these sorts of people, narrowing my world in order to avoid what feels like unpleasant contact. What if I don't want to narrow my world? Are there other options?

This exchange was a bit of a one-sided caricature, so it stood out, asking for my attention. I wondered if it could become the starting point for an article. What was needed for me to stay at this boundary without doing my habitual withdrawal, without narrowing my world, without making space for the other but not for myself? These questions provide the ground for something different, novel, or exciting to take place.

On reflection, I noticed the part of me that was missing from the exchange – the part of me that can push back and offer some resistance before the feeling of invasion becomes too much. I contacted the friend to experiment with pushing back a bit, telling him that the number of suggestions he offered felt pushy to me. Even though my push was met with defensiveness and explanations, in the process of pushing back I connected with my core, my strength and my boundary. I felt more fully myself, and the cycle felt complete for now.

This puts me in mind of Ruella Frank's development of the six fundamental movements she observed in babies up to the age of one: yielding, pushing, reaching, grasping, pulling and releasing (Frank and LaBarre, 2011). She writes:

“Pushing provides leverage to further investigate the environment... As the baby pushes, the experience of weight condenses at the origin...”
of the push... Mass gathers in these places and forms an experience of density” (ibid, p26).

This is a good description of my experience of pushing back, which resulted in my feeling more substantial, more in touch with my core, my strength, and my boundary.

“Sensing one’s mass, or experiencing density and energetic flow brings about an experience of cohesion and integration, as the body’s periphery is experienced in relation to its center” (ibid p26).

The result of pushing back was to feel integrated. I didn't need to feel integrated in order to push back; the act of pushing back created a feeling of integration.

The retroflected push that I so often see in clients appears in different ways. Some clients find they get pushed to breaking point, when they finally erupt and lash out. Other clients never reach breaking point; instead, their retroflected push is consistently directed inwards and downwards.

**SCENARIO 2: PUSHINESS IN RETROFLECTION**

This brings to mind a client I'll call Katy, whom I've been seeing for 4 ½ years. Life is pushing in on her: both parents seriously ill, two young children to care for, her husband working away from home, soon moving to a new area, changing schools for the kids, even the dog has a serious illness and is going in for tests – lots going on.

One of her main coping mechanisms is through food and overeating. In a recent session she was fed up with this habit, “I hate it. I'm disgusted and filled with self-loathing and I don’t know how to stop.” One of the few ways that Katy can connect with a sense of self is through what she feels as a mother, so I asked her what she would say to either of her children if they were older and started putting on weight. “I would ask if there is anything they want to say that they are not saying. I would tell them that I'm here to listen, whatever it is.”

Katy remembered how her mum would punish her if she expressed herself in ways that she didn't approve of, and how Katy learned to silence herself. She went on to make the connection that she is pushing down what she has to say, and over-eating supports this. “The food helps me to push down unacceptable things, and the more food I eat, the more I can keep the words down.” We can now bring this awareness of how she retroreflects to her boundary interactions, slowing down to notice the detail of what happens, the physical sensations involved, the mechanics of retroflection, and how to develop support for what wants to be said.

What happens when a client gets pushy with me? An experience comes to mind where anger helped to mobilise my push back in order to hold my boundary and explore difference.

**SCENARIO 3: PUSHING BACK AGAINST PUSHINESS**

I had been working with Francis (a pseudonym) for 1 ½ years, primarily supporting him with communication issues, often in very practical ways, such as help with writing letters or making phone calls. Francis has a diagnosis of Asperger’s and ADHD, and his contact style is very cognitive,
verbal, and fast. Brevity is not easy for him, and this is an issue he is asking for support with. In a recent session he was expressing frustration with his GPs for not being willing to read his lengthy emails, nor allowing him to talk at great length on the phone without interrupting him.

During this session, Francis was more agitated than usual, and I felt I was on the receiving end as I listened to his frustration. He was trying to get across to me how being interrupted increases his anxiety, and that his doctors should know this; therefore, they do not have his best interests at heart, and they are not professional people.

In an attempt to make contact, I interrupted him with an appeal to his rational thinking, saying, “I think doctors have limitations in what they can provide. That doesn’t necessarily mean that they don’t have your best interests at heart.” His agitation increased, and his anger was now directed at me.

After listening some more, I attempted to acknowledge how angry he was, which increased his anger at being interrupted. Suddenly I felt my own anger ignited, thinking, “Here I am doing my best to support you, and I feel my hands are tied and I am being shouted down and stifled.” I put my hands in the air in front of me and said loudly (and angrily), “Francis, you are very angry, and whatever I do seems to be wrong.” He appeared momentarily shocked, then his attitude shifted, and we were both able to speak calmly and rationally again until the end of the session.

What happened in this moment? As I feel into my response, I get in touch with ‘This is not okay. I am not seen, not regarded. I am an ‘it’ on the receiving end of his diatribe. This pattern feels stuck, like a broken record. If I stay in this groove I am complicit with this relational style. Something needs to change. I need to stand up for myself or I will be swamped and powerless. I can’t be effective unless I am connected with my power’. My hands instinctively came up in front of my chest with an immediate, strong, and unambiguous gesture, both protecting me and pushing back. My anger mirrored his experience, and by expressing the anger clearly, the energy shifted between us, making space for us to meet in a new way. Although not made explicit, we now both had an internal experience of how a clear push can restore contact.

I was grateful that my anger was provoked in this way; it helped me to throw out some last vestiges of that horrible introject about being nice as a therapist. Sometimes we need to be provoked to find our genuine dialogic response, in this case, a push back against his push with a similar intensity.

Mobilised anger is a necessary ingredient for pushing back and creating a clear boundary, providing the fuel that ignites a physical and psychological readiness to aggress. As I turn to my bookshelf, I am reminded that Perls’ first book was entitled Ego, Hunger and Aggression (1947/1969), where he describes the role of aggression in de-structuring contact in order for it to be assimilated. In certain situations anger is part of the ground supporting aggression – for example, a mother ready to protect her young child, a spouse or partner stepping up in defence of their loved one, a peaceful protestor going on a march (the recent marching of children against guns in the USA). In all of these scenarios, the heart is engaged, there
is firm, clear, and undivided intent. Anger is channelled into a clearly directed action, a purposeful readiness to engage with difference at the boundary.

SCENARIO 4: THERAPIST PUSHINESS AND THE PARADOXICAL THEORY OF CHANGE

My starting point as a gestalt psychotherapist is the paradoxical theory of change: the idea that change occurs not when we attempt to be something different, but when we enter fully into whatever we are experiencing at the moment (Beisser, 1970). This raises the question, when is my pushing in line with the paradoxical theory of change, and when am I invested in a certain outcome? It is not always easy and straightforward to distinguish between the two. Here are two examples from my practice.

THERAPIST PUSHINESS 1

Katy arrives, feeling down and low. We explore the sensation, and it’s a pressure on her chest, coming from all of her family – pushing in on her. She tells me a few examples of times she wanted to say something firmly, strongly to her 4 year old daughter or to her mother, and then a voice kicks in with “You are so lucky to have her, you can’t speak like that.” Or with her mother, “She has cancer; you can’t speak to her like that.” This censoring voice runs the show. Is there no other voice to stand up to the censor?

Katy realises she does have a contrasted voice as a mum. She can stand up in support of her son, telling him that his feelings are never wrong, and they deserve to be expressed and heard. The actions that follow on might need to be chosen with care, but the feelings don’t need to be censored. Katy then demonstrates what she said to her mum at a hospital appointment, followed by what she wanted to say.

Me: I don’t hear much difference between those two voices. The energy seems similar to me. (I then speak her words with a more obvious anger energy)

Katy: I feel a little scared about joining in.

Me: Maybe this is foreign. Have you ever expressed your anger full strength?

Katy: There were two times I did let rip at my first husband. One time I even threw an ironing board at him.

Katy went on to recount these experiences. As she spoke, her energy increased, her voice grew louder, her gestures grew bigger, and perhaps most noticeably her eyes sparkled with life as she connected with the humour of throwing an ironing board. For the first time in awhile, the energy in the room between us was alive and energised.

Katy: In those experiences I felt invincible. It didn’t last, and the day after I did all the apologising.

How did I use my push as therapist in support of Katy? First I amplified the energy that was missing from her anger. I pushed for her anger to be clearly heard as an alternative to her familiar (non)relational pattern, or ERT. Katy’s ERT of ‘If I push someone I will hurt them in the same way I was hurt’ overlaps with my own, and this has contributed to my caution about leaning into Katy’s experience of anger for fear of hurting her. But if I refrain from pushing into new resources with Katy, we will stay stuck within the safe and habitual range of response. This time, I leaned into the ERT and found...
another way to be with her, pushing for her/with her. When she was “a little bit scared”, I pushed to stay in contact, in order to find the edge between what she dreads and what she longs for. Instead of passively receiving my push, withdrawing and retroflecting, I invited her to remain in relationship. I got her to notice the impact of my push with these questions: What happens when I bring in this stronger energy? When I push a bit in this direction? How does it feel? How can you hold your ground and know what is right for you? Through the ensuing dialogue we are working out together a new way forward, with my push as an essential part of the process.

THERAΠIST PUSHEENESS 2

My client, whom I’ll call Lucy, comes to a session with much frustration, anger, and resentment. She is 24 years old, and regularly sends money to her mother, who lives abroad, as well as frequently giving money to her boyfriend.

Lucy: Everyone I know takes money from me. It’s like I’m in a piranha tank where the fish are nibbling away at me continuously. No major attack, just nibbling my flesh.

Me: Can you say no?

Lucy: When my mum asks for money, I say to myself “Say no! Say no!” and then I say yes.

Me: If you said no?

Lucy: I don’t want to use ‘no’ the way it was always used against me. People will think I’m stingy. It’s my moral code to provide for my younger siblings. I buy my friends. I pay people to like me.

Me: Do you believe that people will like you for who you are if you don’t pay them?

Lucy: No, I don’t like me for who I am.

In this session I was really pushing to find her capacity to say no. Towards the end Lucy spoke up and said, “Telling me to say no doesn’t help. I can’t. It’s impossible.” Finally I heard her dilemma. I heard where she was stuck, and something in me softened. I could meet her at this place. We were at the end of the session and I summarised.

Me: I believe in your resourcefulness, and that you and I together will find a way through this. I want to do everything in my power to support you in this, and right now I want to say to all the piranhas in the tank, “Give her some space! Back off and leave her alone!”

The energy shifted. Her normally hard, defiant, tough-girl stance loosened, and she looked at me with a girlish smile.

Lucy: I need this in writing. To show them. From my therapist!

Me: Maybe you never had someone say that before.

Hearing these words brought her to tears.

Lucy’s ERT is ‘If I don’t pay people, they won’t like me’. This is more foreign to me, and therefore I pushed to gain better understanding of her worldview. To an observer it might have appeared that I was pushing her to say no, but I wasn’t invested in this as an end goal. I needed to find out her connection/disconnection to her ‘no’ in the field, to understand more about the world she has created and lives in. I also gave a big push with her/for her when I asked the piranhas to back off and give her space; the sort of push she hadn’t experienced before. These are some of the ways in which it is possible, and even necessary, to push without being invested in the outcome. I’m not saying this was a model of great work,
but it’s an example of pushing to find our relational growing edge; me pushing in order to find her edge/where she is stuck, so that I can meet her there. My first *New Gestalt Voices* article was entitled ‘Experiences at the Relational Growing Edge’ (Gwilt, 2017). This present article is leading me to an interest in finding the relational growing edge, and how we sometimes have to push to find that edge. Interestingly, in the weeks following this session, Lucy is rapidly finding her push back and her ‘no’ in various key relationships.

Whatever the client wants, underground is something else sabotaging. Until these two come into contact, there is stalemate. Leaning into this stalemate, or sometimes pushing to find it, brings us to the edge between dread and longing, where both are present, and where the real work can begin. My push as therapist supports my recognition that resources are present, but not being drawn on by the client. I want to relate to my client in a way that opens up the use of other resources in themselves and in the environment. My push can support the fact that change is slow and hard won, and requires repeated exposure to the things that want to shut us down from the new.

**SCENARIO 7: LURED INTO PUSHINESS**

Our client’s despair, chaos, panic, and loss of hope can lure us into an urgency to come up with an answer, if not the answer to their situation. When this happens it’s easy to fall into the trap of needing to do something, and pushing our client for some sort of change rather than retaining our creative indifference (Friedlander, 1918). I recognise this trap when thoughts like these pop up – *I need to do something here. I need to have an answer. What can I tell my client?* - often accompanied by a tension in my pelvis and thighs. My client’s experience can tap into my own landscape of despair, loss of hope and panic, and the more familiar I become with my own emotional landscape, the less I get caught up in their panic.

*This is not okay! It’s horrible. Something is seriously wrong and something needs to be done. Now. She needs help and she needs it now. This is scary and I don’t know what to do. I need help. I need Mum and Dad. If I go and explain what’s happening they’ll know what to do. They’re grown-ups. That’s their job. They are here to protect us. Yes, it will be okay. They’ll know what to do... they’ll take charge and find an answer. They will make sure we’re okay.*

Later...

*Mum says “It’s not so bad. It will get better on its own.” Dad says “Your sister hasn’t asked for our help.” What? Really? That’s it... that’s all you can say? That’s your answer to this problem? Ignore it and it will go away? No, no, no! It won’t get better on its own, it won’t just go away! What’s the matter with you? Mum! Dad! I need you guys to do something! I don’t have anyone else to turn to. You have to do something, now! You’re supposed to take care of us.*

I haven’t thought of this experience for decades, the experience of discovering my older sister’s bulimia. The feelings are as fresh as they were all those years ago – fear, rising panic, anger, and ultimately overwhelming sadness, helplessness and hopelessness.

Our clients often bring panic to us in some form, implicitly or explicitly. It can be contagious, triggering in me the panic I felt then, when nothing was done and it should
have been. This sense of ‘something must be done!’ is in fact highly disempowering. When my push for change comes from this place of panic, rather than a place of calm, centred groundedness, it’s a push that emerges from a futile void, rather than a fertile void. But today I have more resources. When something in my client triggers the thought ‘I must do something, now!’ I have an alternative:

- I know how to quiet my panic.
- I can have deep respect that my client’s story is their truth without getting seduced into seeing it as the only reality.
- I can turn towards description, staying with what I observe, what is happening now.
- Sometimes I can say “This is what’s happening, and I don’t know where it is leading us”. I don’t need to fear the next step when I don’t know what comes next.
- I can see beyond my need to have it worked out in advance.
- I can broaden my awareness to include all the resources in my client, myself and the environment, even when they remain hidden.
- I can remember that if I’ve lost my hope, I’ve lost connection with what unrecognised potential exists. The concept of reasonable hope is a great support for me at times like this: “Reasonable hope does not struggle against an uncertain, unknowable future, but rather embraces it as its best bet” (Weingarten, 2010, p8).

CONCLUSION

As I once again look outwards towards the wider world after my micro-investigation into work with clients, I realise how often a push-back is not an option for me. The obstacles feel too big, I’m too small and the opposing forces are too great. At the same time, I am curious about the potential for developing our push, while staying in relationship.

In 1969, Perls wrote in his introduction to the new edition of Ego, Hunger and Aggression, “the significance of misplaced aggression is as valid today as it was when I wrote this book. A return of the power of aggression from the destruction of cities and people to assimilation and growth... a consummation devoutly to be wished... Bloody unlikely.”

I got a jolt as I read his pessimistic conclusion, although I do share it in response to today’s world. I also feel hopeful, often inspired by the assimilation and growth of my clients and myself. My hope is not some pure state, but rather a reasonable hope that embraces messiness and contradictions; a hope that does not preclude doubt and despair (Weingarten, 2010, p10). The socio-political state of the world today is calling out for our response more strongly than ever. Accepting and adjusting to the situation is no longer enough (if it ever was), and some sort of push back is needed. When we and our clients find this push in our day-to-day relationships, we are developing the essential muscles that support us in pushing back against greater ills.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

As always, when I write about a topic it turns up more obviously in my life.

In recent communications within the NGV community there has been a strong push for change, towards new models of therapy with greater social responsibility. I applaud this and place great value on this progressive
energy. At the same time, I feel incredibly disempowered when the push to change includes an attempt to crush out what I hold most dear. A comment that really got under my skin was the suggestion that psychotherapy work with individuals is a way of avoiding the wider serious problems and injustice in the world. I felt this as an attack, and I pushed back with my argument that dialogic psychotherapy leads to greater empowerment and sense of self, thereby enabling individuals to stand up, take their place, find their voice and push back against injustice.

A few days after my push back I was feeling defensive, disempowered and uncomfortable. What was needed for me to move on? As I sat with my discomfort I remembered some instances of my own capacity to crush another with my fervour and passion, how I can ride roughshod over them, perhaps not in a major way, but the capacity is there. I saw the other polarity in me instead of ‘out there’. This brought in a fresh breath of humility, as well as a sense of empowerment. Ah-ha – I too have this capacity, and bringing it into awareness and acknowledging it means I can choose how I use that capacity. Letting go of my push back doesn’t mean I become a pushover; on the contrary, I can call on this energy when I need it, and use it consciously. It means I have reserves in the arsenal for when the situation warrants it.

Each one of us has the capacity to push, and essentially we have three choices of what we do with this: we can ignore it, we can use our power over others, or we can develop an ethical, relational push, rooted in respect for self and others. Through writing this article I’ve become clear about what makes me most angry: injustice arising from abuse of power, and leadership without responsibility, respect and humility. The unconscious controlling of others is not limited to those in visible positions of power; it is something we all do. Gestalt psychotherapy, with its capacity to speak the truth to power and hierarchy, can be a powerful check on abuse of power, both in ourselves and in others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A big thank you to Deirdre and Amanda who both pushed me in a relational way to develop my article, supporting my belief that writing can be a relational experience.

I must give credit to Tomi Rozman. I enjoyed his use of ‘situations’ to structure his article, ‘Lunch as a Small Gestalt Session’, and was inspired to try the conversational format myself.

REFERENCES


Friedlaender, S. (1918) Schöpferische Indifferenz (Creative Indifference), München: Reinhardt


---

**Dawn Gwilt** is a UKCP registered gestalt psychotherapist working in private practice. *She is thrilled to be editing this edition of New Gestalt Voices international journal, and is passionate about working with writers and other contributors to get their voices heard.*

dawn@newgestaltvoices.org
UKAGP CONFERENCE:
HERE & NOW... BUT WHAT NEXT?
Report by Dawn Gwilt

I wanted to include a write-up of this conference in the journal because the UKAGP is a significant organisation for gestalt in the UK with whom we can have strong links, and the voices of its members are important. I also want to note a recent development: Belinda Harris, the current chair, and the previous chair, Jacqui Lichtenstern, have worked hard to establish reciprocal membership links with the EAGT – the umbrella gestalt organisation for Europe. Joint membership is now easily accessible between the two organisations.

It is the day after the conference, held on 30th June in Birmingham, and I am sitting with a sense of a significant shift within our community. I sense a sea-change, a movement, a collective push, a drive... A fire has been lit, or rather a series of small fires are aglow. This is an essential point – a series of small fires rather than one big collective fire is what makes this conference stand out from any other I have attended. Yesterday many strands of interest/passion/excitement were encouraged, supported, and developed, as opposed to the in-fighting that has sometimes dominated our community’s discussions.

Maybe it’s because of the larger number of trainees who attended, bringing their freshness, openness to change, and sense of social responsibility that is sometimes lacking at these events. I noticed a willingness to look in new directions, a discontent with our outmoded insular approach, and a palpable creative energy generating new ideas for how to engage outwardly, within our own communities, and into the wider world.

The conference was very ably organised by the UKAGP organising committee, chaired by Belinda Harris. Her opening remarks set the tone by asking questions such as: How do we have a dialogue across, within and around gestalt? What is our brand, our core mission, our reason to be, our position in the field? What are we not owning and projecting? What is our shadow side? Why are there so few black and Asian trainees? Have we lost our potent edge? How do we limit our potency? How do we use knowledge and power in the wider field? A great strength of gestalt is our honouring of resistance – where we meet someone where they are, move towards them, lean into our differences, and leave them feeling met.
In the keynote speech, Madeleine Fogarty explained the history and development of the Gestalt Therapy Fidelity Scale. She developed this scale at the end of 2014, and has devoted many years of passion and tenacity to researching its effectiveness, so she is well placed to tell us about the state of gestalt in the world today. The scale was designed to work within the limits of observability within a therapy session, and in 2016 it was tested through a Delphi Study, which is required for validation. After two rounds there was 80% agreement, which is very high. The stark facts are that without a fidelity scale you can’t get anything published in a journal outside of our own community, and that gestalt therapy is declining in the Anglo-sphere, although it is growing in South America, Mexico and some European countries.

The fishbowl that followed, led by Hugh Pidgeon, included these views:

- Excitement at the use of the Fidelity Scale at the Edinburgh Gestalt Institute for skills practice and for final year assessments
- Disillusionment at not passing the dissertation – is this because of a pull between different criteria? A lack of consistency?
- The need to have a fidelity scale in order to get NICE evidencing
- NICE evidencing is not just about working within the NHS
- A question – should we as gestalt therapists try to get recognised by NICE guidelines?
- An answer - we need to be in and we need to be out
- Excitement and horror at having a manual of gestalt therapy
- The manual being drawn up by Phillip Brownell is a manual-less manual

- The biggest value of training was it was okay for me to be me. I don’t want to lose that.
- Sonia Nevis was quoted as speaking about finding a balance between the strategic and the intimate, and how we can only thrive if we move between the two
- There is already lots of manualised criteria being used in the UK – usually written by one or two people at each training institute, leading to the risk of abusing power

From the fishbowl, different strands emerged:

- How do we find a language that is accessible to all?
- How can we develop a training and assessment process that is creative and not just academic?
- How can we address the lack of accessibility for both clients and trainees?
- How can we integrate research and practice of gestalt therapy?
- How can we make research dialogic?

In small groups we asked, what steps can we take here and now, today? There was a commitment to action as we explored ideas for developing and growing gestalt, for making the most of what we have to offer, for serious strategic thinking about branding and promotion... all in order to be more effective, more inclusive, more accessible.

In the days following the conference, a WhatsApp group of gestalt ambassadors has formed, looking into ways of promoting and making gestalt visible (see proposed hoodie design), there is a new sub-group for coordinating and promoting research (see initial ideas), there is a group looking into
how to develop both UKAGP and gestalt as a brand, starting a *Twitter* campaign to which you can contribute using *#gestalt_is*
This is a start, a grassroots building-up of connections from the base, building on the energy and interest expressed and shared at the conference.

The essential follow-up question is, how do we build momentum and keep the conversation going? If you would like to join the conversation, visit the UKAGP website: [www.ukagp.org.uk](http://www.ukagp.org.uk)

---

*Proposed hoodie design*

*Initial ideas for coordinating and promoting research*
In late 2017, New Gestalt Voices was approached by Relational Change with a proposal to co-sponsor a research bursary, for which they would provide the funding. Relational Change is a community of gestalt therapists and organisational practitioners, mostly based in the UK and Europe, with a mission to promote a relational approach in all walks of life. They also run training courses, workshops, and retreats.

The idea was that NGV would help by advertising the bursary to its readership and would also make recommendations on who should receive the award. We agreed a plan whereby NGV would select the top three applications and the RC team would make the final decision.

One of NGV’s team members, Melissa Sedmak, agreed to oversee the process for us. After it had been concluded, Dawn Gwilt had the idea that including a piece in the journal about the process, and Melissa’s experience of it, might help support future applicants. So, before introducing the recipient of the award, we’d like to share the ‘what and how’, presented in interview format:

DG: How did the idea for a research bursary come about?

MS: Relational Change has had a researcher-in-residence in the past. They were looking for ways to collaborate with NGV, and invited us to get involved in the 2018 selection process.

DG: And what is your personal interest in research?

MS: I have a doctorate in organisational communication, looking at change management and project management in manufacturing companies. Part of my work is looking at dissertation project proposals by master’s students. So this is familiar territory.

DG: What was your first contact like with the submitted proposals?

MS: I felt a lot of responsibility! I was acting on behalf of the NGV organisation, in collaboration with RC, and this is in contrast with my work at university, where I am part of the institution, and the structure is set. None of that structure was in place, so this felt very fluid, and I was uncomfortable.
I received eight proposals, and my first reading through them took two hours. They were varied in length. Each of them was really interesting and I wanted to find out more about every one.

DG: Was that a possibility, to find out more about each one? So far, considering the research is on relationality, it sounds as though you felt alone in the process – that it wasn’t relational for you.

MS: It wasn’t possible to contact the applicants because of the timeline we had set. There was only three months between posting the advert and receiving proposals. With hindsight, we could have allowed more time, and that would have made relational contact at this stage a possibility. However, contacting the candidates would have introduced a loop in the process that would then make it unfair - for example, if I had contacted some candidates with questions to elaborate on, but not others; or, of which candidate I would ask what question.

DG: What support did you have in the decision making process?

MS: In order to proceed with making a decision I needed to ask that question – what would support me? After the first reading, I was unsure how to judge between the proposals. How do I make it fair, transparent, and not based on my personal preference? The proposals were all engaging, but in the end I started asking, how well have they met the criteria? This is the first question I ask of student proposals in my university work. So to support myself, I realised I needed to talk it through with someone and not just make decisions in isolation, primarily because the context here was different. This conversation centred around what I had done and how I intended to approach the selection.

DG: How did that question, about proposals meeting the criteria, support you?

MS: This question provided the structure I needed in order to compile a shortlist. The criteria provided definite aspects that I could measure and assess, and after I looked at criteria, the selection happened quickly. The criteria were:

1. Being relational
2. In line with the ethos of *Relational Change*
3. Being clear about what the potential benefit or outcome of the research would be.

I would have preferred to see references included, as any research is based on the existing literature. We didn’t explicitly ask for references and this added to my challenge. We had applicants who were not gestaltists, so some of the terminology and theories were new to me. References would have helped me to track down those theories quicker than googling them. I would also say the proposals were thin on planning. Project managing is my specialty, and there is a saying, ‘Fail to plan, plan to fail.’ This all added to my discomfort – I couldn’t go into what I normally would and judge how feasible the proposals were in terms of the time available.

DG: How did you manage your discomfort in choosing the shortlist?

MS: The key thing was, is the theme of relationality or being relational actually addressed? Some applicants didn’t use the word at all. All the proposals were about relationality implicitly, but it needed to be
addressed directly. There were interesting research questions, but some of them missed this core point. The proposal that was successful addressed the topic, wrote about the potential outcome and benefit, was clearly laid out, and was well developed.

DG: What happened with your shortlist?

MS: I sent the top three proposals to the team at RC, for them to make the final decision. It was difficult to know how much I should justify my choices. At this point, the question for me was, to what extent am I the authority? And I was wondering how much I should be influencing them and in that way affecting their decision making, which comes back to the issue of no clear boundaries. In other words, is it a review where the second reviewer should not be influenced by the first one, or should I make recommendations? In the end I wrote a very concise reason for each of my decisions.

DG: And after the final selection was made, how did you notify the unsuccessful candidates?

MS: This was the hardest thing, saying no to all but one of them. At university I have the department behind me, the roles are clear and we all know what we are doing; here it was more of a challenge, due to the fluidity of the new organisation and the new process for us. I thought a lot about what sort of feedback I should give, and how much time I had available for this. I decided to provide the key feedback, and again, sticking with the criteria gave structure to the feedback.

DG: Finally, what have you learned about relationality through this process?

MS: That the written word obscures it; annihilates it! I felt so detached from everyone and everything. A lot was lost through communicating via writing with a lack of other contact.

DG: What would you do differently next time?

MS: Rather than evaluating written proposals only, I would like to have a day of face-to-face presentations. This would enable a back-and-forth dialogue, and some of the less developed ideas could grow through the exchange, then the written submissions could follow. I would make the advert more explicit, asking for references and setting a word limit. I would also prefer the submissions to be anonymous, although this wouldn't be possible with face-to-face presentations.

MS: I'm also thinking about how to support people who have not been through a PhD process to write their proposals. It might be useful if I write a basic article on how to present a research proposal, for those less experienced.

DG: Maybe this is a future article for the NGV journal!
THE RECIPIENT OF THE RELATIONAL CHANGE RESEARCH BURSARY: Dominic Hosemans, PhD

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONALITY IN GESTALT THERAPY

Relationality within gestalt therapy arises through the depth of contact between both the client and therapist. This is experienced as the space that is co-created in-between, which ultimately expands the horizon of perception for both therapist and client through such meeting. The aim of the current research project is to deepen our understanding of the phenomenological experience of relationality according to clients within gestalt therapy. The study will have significant implications in terms of furthering our understanding of relationality beyond a theoretical sense into a more embodied sense of what it means to be in relationship within gestalt therapy.

Dominic Hosemans graduated from his PhD in the area of counselling psychology. His thesis examined the experience of equanimity within meditation. Having previously completed a master’s degree in psychology (counselling), Dominic works in private practice as a psychologist, dividing his time between adults in a low-cost clinic, as well as working from a child-centered play therapy paradigm with children. He has recently commenced training with Gestalt Therapy Australia.
Dear Dr Pearls,

My therapist keeps telling me to push my boundaries to their growing edge, and go out into the field and stay in a fertile void.

I have done this and planted several different types of vegetables in this fertile void. So far, the only thing that grows is parsnips. The local rabbits keep eating my crops and the neighbouring farmer says I'm on his land.

Please advise me as I have no crops left, and the farmer says next time I cross onto his boundary he will bring his gun. I urgently need your help. What should I do?

Yours,

Malcolm Lewin
Dear Malcolm,

Your problem is serious. You must confront your therapist. It is very clear to me, she has unfinished business as a landscape gardener that is pressing for closure. God only knows what transferential tangle you’ve got yourselves into but I suggest quitting therapy and spending your money on a trip to Disneyworld instead. There are many different ways we can become whole.

I once went to Disneyworld. Meeting Mickey Mouse in person offered me the support that had been so missing in my life. It allowed me to grow into the psychotherapist I am today. Mickey, Minnie, Donald Duck, I saw in them what I could become.

As for these rabbits, they are likely to be disowned parts of yourself, hopping around in small furry costumes. I didn't get where I am today by not reintegrating disowned parts of myself that had been masquerading as household pets. I once discovered a very large German Shepherd in my shadow. That took some reintegrating, I can tell you. Incidentally, when I say German Shepherd I'm referring to the dog, not actually a German shepherd... you understand?

Let me offer you some extra words of support: “You and I know, how the heartaches come and they go and the scars they're leaving. You'll be dancing once again and the pain will end, you will have no time for grieving”.

I hope these ease your suffering. They’re from Chiquitita, the 1979 Abba hit, a particular favourite of mine. I think I may be diverting from my brief a little. Let me get back on track, and finally add, I'm wondering if the next door farmer is actually your top-dog. I strongly advise putting her into the empty chair and seeing what happens. We must be brave in our efforts to heal the splits. He who dares, wins; he who dares, wins.

Right, I must go. I'm singing in a karaoke competition against Sigmund and Carl Junior this evening, and need to fit in some practice.

Your friend, confidant, and life adviser,

Dr Fake Pearls
Financial Support

New Gestalt Voices is a not-for-profit organisation, and we aim to keep this journal free to access. We keep costs very low, with the team working on a voluntary basis. However, we do incur some expenses in producing the journal and maintaining the website, relying on donations and advertising revenue to meet these - and currently we are short of funds!

If you feel able to contribute towards these costs, you can make a donation through our PayPal account. Simply click on the image on this page if you’re reading this in a PDF. Otherwise, you can donate via the link on our website.

If you’d like to place an advertisement, please contact us. Our production editor can help with design. We ask £100 for a full page in the journal, and £50 for half page. Adverts are also uploaded to the events and notices section on the website and remain there until the next issue.

No matter how large or small your financial contribution might be, it is very much appreciated. It will help ensure the future of the journal as a platform for new voices in gestalt, encouraging the pushing of boundaries, discussion, and debate.
If you respond to an advertisement, please remember to tell the advertiser that you saw it in NGV!

If you would like an advert or a notice posted on our website and published in the next edition of the journal, or have any questions about this, please email: sally@newgestaltvoices.org
Topics

"Research in Gestalt Therapy: Towards an Effective Practice"

Sub-themes
- Basic Starting Considerations for Research in Gestalt Therapy
- Developing Research Projects—either completed or in progress
- Growing edge in the Field of Research in Gestalt Therapy, Coaching, and Organizational Development
- Coordinating and Organizing Gestalt Research Internationally

Keynote Speakers
Clara Hill, PhD
Michael J. Lambert, PhD
Mariane Krause, PhD

Scientific Committee
- Philip Brownell (USA)
- Alessandra Merizzi (United Kingdom)
- Antonio Martínez Ribes (Chile-Spain)
- Claudia Fernández (Mexico)
- Dr. Otto Glanzer (Germany)
- Ecce Alexandru (Romania)
- Francisco Huneeus (Chile)
- Gianni Francesetti (Italy)
- Jan Roubal (Czech Republic)
- Madeleine Fogarty (Australia)
- Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb (Italy)
- Marina Varas Schnake (Chile)
- Mark Reck (USA)
- Pablo Herrera Salinas (Chile)
- Vincent Beja (France)

Steering Committee
- Philip Brownell (USA)
- Marina Varas (Chile)
- Antonio Martínez (Chile-Esp)
- Pablo Herrera (Chile)

Email: contact@congresogestalt.cl (562 25858180) - Zentidos Conference Organizer
Training Courses 2018 -

Accredited Training in Gestalt Therapy Years 2-4
Manchester Gestalt Centre is restarting the accredited course, years 2-4 this October 2018. The core trainer is Danny Porter. He will be joined by other MGC and external trainers. The course leads to the GPTI Diploma in Gestalt Psychotherapy and UKCP registration. The diploma programme consists of four taught years; this three year programme is for candidates who have already completed the one year foundation training or equivalent. A GPTI Certificate of Completion will be issued upon successful completion of the four-year core training. Students then need to meet the requirements of the diploma and UKCP registration (a further 2 years) See website for further details.

Foundation Training in Gestalt Therapy
Our next foundation training in Gestalt Therapy commences October 2018 through to July 2019. The foundation course will be led by Joy Appleby and Shirley Summers. The course will be 150 training hours. It can be taken as a stand-alone one year foundation training in Gestalt therapy or, alternatively, for those wishing to progress to become UKCP registered Gestalt Psychotherapists, this training will provide opportunities to apply for possible ongoing training routes either at Manchester Gestalt Centre or other centres. See website for more info.

CPD Courses We have a range of 1 day CPD courses running throughout the year.

Check the website for further details
THE EVOLUTION OF SUBJECTIVITY: A KINETIC-KINESTHETIC PROGRESSION

with Ruella Frank, PhD

Location: Edinburgh
Dates: 16-18 November 2018
Cost: £395

In this three-day workshop, we explore the progressions of a developing subjectivity from kinetic-kinesthetic processes during fetal life, where the organism is in a state of “oneness” with its environment, to the newborn child who begins the gradual process of differentiating “me” from “not me” in the first year. Special emphasis will be given to the functional similarity of this vital experiential shift in relation to the subtle yet profound existential experiences emerging within adult therapy. Attention also will be given to kinetic-kineesthetic processes arising in therapy, which clarify the experience of subjectivity for both the patient and therapist.

Ruella Frank, Ph.D., founder and director of the Center for Somatic Studies, teaches throughout the United States, Europe, Mexico and Canada.

This workshop is open to trainee and qualified psychotherapists from any modality
Cost includes non-refundable £125 deposit
To book, please visit our website or email info@egi.uk.com

www.egi.uk.com
FAISAL MAHMOOD
Jihad in the Therapy Room

This event will address diversity and cultural issues—a timely topic important to all practitioners and trainees. The focus will be on Islam in the context of the therapeutic relationship but the lessons to be learnt apply across all therapists and client groups.

Faisal will reflect on three areas that impact his identity as a Western Muslim Therapist.

- The Western perception of Islam, fed by sound-bites about Jihad and stories of atrocities
- How these perceptions of Islamic concepts, taken out of context, may affect our contact with ‘the other’ in the therapy room
- How this ‘distance’ inside and outside the therapy room impacts his work as a Gestalt therapist.

In the afternoon, Faisal will facilitate an experiential session in which participants will be invited to explore their experiences of Islam and Muslims.

Faisal Mahmood is a Senior lecturer in counselling/psychotherapy at Newman University, Birmingham, UKCP-registered individual and group Gestalt psychotherapist and BACP-Registered Accredited Counsellor

For full details and to book a place, visit the MFL website at http://mariannefrylectures.uk

PGI Pacific Gestalt Institute

We are pleased to support New Gestalt Voices and encourage new writers to raise your voices!

Gary Yontef & Lynne Jacobs

www.gestalttherapy.org
FROM MANCHESTER GESTALT CENTRE

TOPICS IN GESTALT THERAPY

Occasional Kindle Papers by
Peter Philipppson

The first 9 papers are online at the Amazon Kindle and Kobo store, for around £2 or local equivalent in other countries. Many of the papers are translated into different languages. Kindle articles can also be read on computers and tablets. There is also a linked online discussion group.

See www.mgc.org.uk/publications/topics-gestalt-therapy
RELATIONAL ORGANISATIONAL GESTALT
Starts January 25, 2019 | Esher, Surrey

ROG is a holistic and practical approach to facilitating organisational and individual change. The programme provides skill enhancing training for coaches, consultants, leaders/managers, OD and HR professionals, facilitators and change agents. This training is also ideal for therapists and counsellors aiming to move into coaching or organisational work.

SUPERVISION: A RELATIONAL CHANGE PROCESS
Starts January 31, 2019 | Kingston-upon-Thames

Based on our model of a deeply relational and contextual approach to supervision and supervisory practice, this certificate/diploma course is UKCP recognised, meets BACP standards, and is suitable for psychotherapists, counsellors, coaches and organisational practitioners, with at least 2 years experience, wishing to be accredited to supervise others.

RELATIONAL CHANGE: COUPLES WORK
Starts February 22, 2019 | Surrey/Midlands

This certificate/diploma programme focuses on effective, couples work, with the emphasis on a pragmatic and creative approach to working within a relational frame. It includes a combination of theoretical frameworks, experiential learning and relevant skills, as well as working with embodied process and experimental interventions.

THE GATHERING: MOVEMENT AND EMBODIED SENSING
November 29, 2018 | Central London

This low cost day is an opportunity to explore the power of non-verbal communication, and how we can support contacting through movement. Whether you are a therapist, coach, organisational consultant, or simply interested in the work of Relational Change, we believe you will discover something useful at our annual community gathering.

See website for details and join our mailing list to receive news and updates on all events, workshops, and courses!

www.relationalchange.org
We hope you’ve enjoyed reading this issue of *New Gestalt Voices International Journal*
Your feedback is much appreciated – email your comments to dawn@newgestaltvoices.org

The fourth edition of the journal will be published in January 2019. If you might like to contribute a piece please get in touch as soon as possible. We welcome anything that can be shared in PDF format. You don’t have to be a student or recently qualified or a first-time writer. And we’re keen to feature more from the many gestaltists working in the coaching and organisational fields.

If you’d rather not wait for the next journal, you may like to produce a short article or a video or something else that can be published immediately on our blog. Please see the website for ideas. There you’ll also find details of other ways you can contribute or help support NGV financially.

www.newgestaltvoices.org