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Through our international journal, *New Gestalt Voices* offers 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, journaling, dialogue, debate, 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.

NGV is a not-for-profit organisation, committed to widening participation and gently challenging hierarchy and dominant cultures within the gestalt community and beyond. We offer support for anyone who wants to do something different that accords with these aims.

We rely on donations and advertising revenue to meet the costs involved in producing this journal and maintaining the website. Please consider contributing to our funds - see page 61 for details.
It is with a tingling sense of reverence that I sit down to pen this introduction to another edition of the journal. I didn’t imagine I would be writing the editor’s letter again, but such is the way. On the one hand, I have this privilege of editing a gestalt journal. On the other, I am struggling with, and intermittently failing, my own written assignments as part of my gestalt qualification.

This weekend I almost didn’t attend my training. There were multiple reasons for not going, from experiencing myself as alienated from aspects of gestalt theory, to ‘pre-wedding jitters’ about whether I want to be a therapist, and also a more spiritually oriented questioning as to what is the right path for me, and awareness of paths not taken.

My experience is that sometimes I have to go right to the edges of gestalt in order to find gestalt. Many practitioners describe gestalt as a beautiful conceptualisation of an aspect of the world, but not the whole. Or, perhaps we can allow gestalt to talk to the whole if we extend it to somehow include within it the fundamental contradictions that are the hallmark of mystery, and spirituality. Otherwise it seems to me we must somehow eschew everything gestalt seems to stand for in order to find gestalt. It is as if we have to navigate to the far reaches in order to come home.

There is no logical reason why articles get submitted for a particular issue of the journal. And yet, when they come together they always seem to talk to each other and talk to me. It’s like I’m trying to discern, from amidst the individual contributions, the particular voice that is clamouring for attention now – as much from what articles say directly as from what they gesture at.

This edition of NGV weaves a particular poetry that speaks to the outer reaches of our experience. Articles invoke science, the sublime (pain and beauty), places beyond the disintegration of consciousness. Or, as applied to organisations, beyond ordered paradigms into a world of formlessness and complexity. And there is the voice of the
voiceless - the homeless person, the refugee, the clown. In this issue we find voices of those new to gestalt, and the well-seasoned, from countries including Mexico and Georgia, and more traditional European territory - as well as the UK!

When I look to the journal as a testbed or metaphor for what does not find roots elsewhere, I take particular encouragement from the appetite, and need, of our contributors to play with disintegration, to bring in their worlds beyond gestalt, which are as rich and diverse as theology, tree-coppicing, and mental breakdown. These are our borderlands, and I believe that if we are hospitable to the peoples from these lands, we come to understand better who we are, and identify less with an exclusive idea of home.

I give you our authors, and encourage you to write and tell them if their work touches you.

If you’d like to contribute a piece for a future edition, or maybe you’d like to have the experience of editing an issue, or think you might be able to help in some other way, please contact me!

It has been suggested that we introduce a subscription fee for this journal, but we’d very much like to keep it free to access! Currently, we rely on advertising revenue and donations to meet the costs involved in producing each edition and running the website. If you value what we’re doing please consider supporting New Gestalt Voices by placing an advertisement or simply making a donation to our funds. You’ll find more information on page 61.
New Gestalt Voices is seeking chapter proposals from gestaltists and/or gestalt-aware clients for a forthcoming book on GSD experience within gestalt psychotherapy.

The book takes its lead from the NGV journal in wanting to support expression of a range of different voices, from the more theoretically advanced to trainee and client perspectives. We particularly want to encourage people who identify as GSD to write for us. We will provide a lot of support to help you develop your ideas via mentoring and opportunities to come together with other writers. We hope this book will develop better understanding of gender and sexual diversity in all its varieties (including straight and cis-gender perspectives) across the gestalt field.

Our aims
• help practitioners to be more effective
• help clients to receive better (and non damaging) gestalt therapy
• help reduce stigma and further the liberation of gender and sexual diverse people
• contribute to the advancement of gestalt therapy

How to propose a chapter
• write a 1-2 page proposal on your chapter
• help us understand how your proposal/contribution can help to grow the field of GSD in gestalt
• submit your proposal via email to John Gillespie (john@newgestaltvoices.org) and Ayhan Alman de la Osa (ayhanalmandelaosa.uk) no later than 31st March 2019

And if you’d like to discuss any aspects of this beforehand, don’t hesitate to drop us a line!
I have always enjoyed the abstract nature of a poem and its capacity for multiple and deep meaning-making. However, after a period of psychosis, where I was immersed in a state of utter confusion and loneliness, I could not put pen to paper. It was as though the rug had been pulled out from underneath me and nothing I could say had any meaning.

As I have been traveling the hard road of recovery through heavy medication, anxiety and depression, I have tried to reclaim my love for writing. I have been struggling to express myself and share my experiences; this creates a profound feeling of isolation, even in company.

This long poem was written over the course of a year, out of the desire to communicate the depth of feeling in me and a longing to reach out and share something incomprehensible, asking all the while “am I the only one?”, knowing I am not.

The process of writing the poem was powerful, it brought my experiences into the light. Since, as I have slowly shared it with friends, I have benefitted from the cathartic experience of feeling known or being seen. This motivated me to share it more widely because although it is about psychosis, more broadly it is about being human in a dislocated and confusing world. I think there are lots of us who can identify with that.
This is for those who watch the sun draw on their eyelids
Who keep them shut to see messages of light
Shape and colour collude with one another
Scribbled galactic secrets send a flicker and flash
A fractured diagram of consciousness
Our fractal neurones mimicked
Drawings in the darkness of the mind

Behold the vault of brains
Alive and connected
They are the glitches
Breaking through our reality

Andromeda is a waiting silence

Andromeda is a waiting silence
Heralding dusk over the Milky Way
Listen for the battle drums of a spiral homogeny
Strain for the fanfare of a princess bride arriving
Andromeda, the advancing enemy or our total completion

Tremble as two gargantuan black holes draw desire lines for one another
This cartwheeling encounter forecast beyond the realms of meaning
God’s second coming, a new ground of being
Yes! And a love story fit for dragons
The moment we lay down our galactic identity
Is Andromeda fleeing a monster?
The Milky Way its saviour
Offering variety, the essence of life
Or instead is our neighbour an oppressive colonial galaxy
On a quest for more stars as she dries up
We the damsel in distress awaiting Perseus
I am in hospital though I think it is a spaceship
   A choice must be made
   Emphatically three options stand
   Just permit a needle to slide for your veins
   Go to sleep with the faithful and await rescue
Option two: step onto the spaceship and the adventure of a new world
   Hurtle into a vast story of endless seeking to find your true self
   An unbridled extra-terrestrial entity
   The third way is to stay
   Try to salvage a world drained of life
   Struggle for air to breathe as you
huddle together with all that is wholesome and try to coordinate a revival
At different points all three are chosen
   The way is not linear
   Multiple choices play out in tandem
Scenes transition with an intense urgency
   Oscillate and transfer meaning like chameleon
I meet dark eyed friends in scrubs
   whose pupils dilate at my every seismic thought
The heavily lit corridors never lead to clarity
   Angular lines of light pierce closed eyes
   Impressions of the science fiction set
   fix themselves to a waking dream
 I sink deeper into a hard floor
   Through it to floating
   Trying to surrender
The little cloud is not so little
A flocculent vision deep in mystery
The book of fixed stars cannot keep still
This inevitable collision is risky theatre
One day without audience a dance will occur
Or is it a fight
Out of trauma growth, a loop of promise
A new name at stake
Elliptical no Disc
The future shape eludes us

Take the tiny increments of change
Charging through the timeline of creation
Swirling galaxies shaping an expanding universe
Past birth pains of first Sun
Long lunges in time to life emerging
Humanity just a needle prick in this story
In linear sense we are a flash in the pan
A speck in a dust bowl
Yet in breadth
the magnitude of lives lived positions humanity as the second big bang
Endless industry, rumination and reimagining
Cultures, wars and cures,
romance, betrayals and collapse
A perpendicular explosion off the scale of big history
Words first mind later
Mash phrases with force
Feminism forgotten like Nature
Reality forged by the hands of men
Puny imaginations
Punitive hearts
Partial being presently undone
On cigarette packets
print pictures of naked men in the foetal position
Global submission the goal
Images locked in for later
Brooding until such time as they manifest
Eyes snag on terrifying detail
Each encounter imbued with meaning
Road signs read ‘Free recovery, await rescue’
I don’t know how to stop
Frenetically I stumble into the epic story of an invisible watchmaker
Connected the patterns of your iris with a blueprint to the brain
And that with a map of the galaxy
With which I will find you again
Pacing at the threshold of answers
Hitting out at caring hands that will never comprehend how little I trust them
This is larger than any routine check-up
I will not get in that wheelchair to feel its rigid embrace
I walk the corridors
The rock of my reality shaken
Fissures rush to sabotage syntax
Finally, I agree to lie down on the bed under the laser
To be killed
Though when I don't die a new plot is afoot
For a while Jesus is me
Even when I no longer believe it I am convinced others do
Most revile me for my arrogance
Queues form outside my hospital bed
The air a flint knife fire of accusations
Every kind word and deed ever offered weighed against my shortcomings
Gnashing of teeth as my flesh is ripped
I have been co-opted by the schemes of big religion
The world is ending and here is the cure
People dive in to discount the possibility publicly
Real loved ones squeeze into the ward to flow with my unease
There is a rescue mission afoot to save someone we all loved
I am firing up every sense to follow the plot and hit my cues
At every right turn faces peel off to reveal connection
Every time it gets down to me, the smell of sea
Salt on the air
In the shower trying to fold into myself and reach the happy ever after
I can't have it all without sacrifice
The sentence on my life a bitter pull
Shower to the sea and eventually
On repeat
I can teach you what I will not learn
Tenet of the damned
Cycle of sand
My wacky cannon perpetually unresolved
So many words
Left to fade
Astronaut which way is home?
Emerald lover now cloistered in the great silence
What direction will you go?
For earth is the origin of all life everywhere
We are an epic story read by future ancestors from other planets
Distant cousins who played the catapult game
from one outpost to another through galaxies
The ripple effect ever after
Like new pathways flashing in an expanding brain

The way the coloured stage beams
Rapid strobe holds the smoke
A blanket formed to hush
the insistent wind of a harsh world
There will be a day when the warm drugs of basement clubs
Turn cold
All the euphoria transformed into collective dread
Canticles of ecstasy to hymns of desolation

All words ring in a room too big
Seek after an untraceable trail
tongue tied I crawl
From the inarticulate pit of meaning
Tilt my head at the shadows
Gleaming streets in lamppost light
The moon not there
You can't turn back the tide
Though it will come again
Raise up white noise
Where absence destroys
Drowning in a cauldron of lies
Sorrow stained
Face wrecked to the sky
Dreams have become visions  
I walk as nightmare  
Passenger to places I would not choose  
Where those I adore are raped  
Because I could not love them enough  
Guilt grins and digs his heals in  
My love impoverished and faulty  
For love is action not just flow  
Next to her I am passive  
I am impotent  

Astronaut you have no-where to hide  
Floating away from your hearth where every thought had a place  
Forgotten the bliss of an evening glass charged with gold  
Far from skins touch and the suspense of another's gaze  
Aborted meaning with weightlessness  
Cold zodiacal light sweeps the stage  
Through ice and dust  
Oh astronaut!  
You were once a baby  
Connected  
Not lonely  

Andromeda is a watching angel
Andromeda is a watching angel
The very curvature of the earth has become a screen
Aliens who were once my friends monitor every thought tremor
My pathetic cowering self is broadcast for scrutiny
Disdainful round table discussions taint every choice I ever made
Sexual desires, regrets, repression and inconsistencies aired live
The stuff of tabloids
Then just an idea becomes the only truth
Nuclear weapons are about to be set off in my brain
Of course Trump and Russia place me centre stage
How I behave is linked to the detonation
I tip-toe through the park
Helicopters roar overhead
Motorbike engines the angry voices of those who once knew me
Bitterly let down by my hubris they tear around the universe trying to undo my mistakes
Hot debate rings over the planet
The jury is out on this immature preposterous creature
The show has commentary like it is sport
What is he going to do next? disembodied experts comment on every flinch
He’s undermined the work of his grandad
Do we have a spokesperson for the disgraced family tree?
The source of this single human
Who spurned life and has bought about the end of humanity

Shrinking back to earth
Sitting by a diminishing camp fire in the growing cold
The coded message of feet brushes past
I can’t remember what the signal means or how to make things better
Back through the strife and leaps of evolution
To nothing, a mean small nothing
A lurid game of leap frog spins backwards in double time
A kaleidoscope in reverse
All squirming and head throbs
A manic jostle without oxygen
Me truly alone
One impotent planet hanging in a great gulf of emptiness
White goods animate
My washing machine a messenger from the future
Gurgling instructions
An encrypted mantra I cannot decipher
Leaves me panicked

This stencil existence
The longing for a line to follow
A dot-to-dot dichotomy
I watch the barrel and arms of a spiral galaxy in the kitchen sink
Coffee granules as cosmic dust swirl then disappear
Yes, I live in a small world
No longer generous hearted
God now an alien
Shaking in the mornings
I have a soul that resonates on the frequency of a violin solo
Teeters above and below the hairline quiver of each string

Memory scrambled and attention span of a fish
Adrift in the deep sea of unknowing
Sinking underwater feelings
Synapses under siege
Unbridled dopamine now broken in
Mining for meaning on the dark side of the moon
Seeking simple faith
A trust in goodness
Astronaut won’t you start dancing
Find that roots of rhythm remain
under your suit encoded sinew sings
infinite regression unleashes a whirling dervish
Your small self dissolves
In eccentric orbit
You let your body grow into the music
Give everything
Join a larger dance
Where love dances with hate
two steps forward one step back
History an arc reaching slowly for harmony
Out of the murky misery of memory
light dashes free for another skirmish
Won’t all that rises up converge
In evolution may we find breath
This the omega point

The lyrics climb from the song as personal rebuke
Everything is addressed to me
Fat ark angel pumped with love
Greedy for that generous force
I am unescapable
Inevitable doom perennial as carbon
A stranger in the world
I go running through tunnels
I run past the sweet smell of graffiti paint
Pound over ‘EGO’ written in silver
I despise myself and feel guilty
The recurring nightmare of my youth had no storyline
It was all sensation
Frantic colour squeeze
Head tight and breathless
I keep running through tunnels
Another artist sprays the words
‘its bad luck’
The birds tell me
I am breaking something
At the coal face
Those who insist life is beautiful
Resist the onslaught of practical matters
They bathe in rational complexity like it is a hot spring
Suffer like canaries in the underground darkness of war
Displaced creatures offering warning
To a toxic world

In the kitchen I struggle over which tea to choose
The aroma of each flavour has super-massive consequences
I have to focus
My partner is another expression of me
Literally we are one
When I dance and twirl the other side of me is lost
I have to stay focused so she can think
I think my true self is Alice Coltrane for a while
Trawl her mystical music for messages
For signs of me
Join a beautiful revolution of the collective soul
Like beads on a string
I am looking for a great freeing

Overwhelmingly we are all the same
So goes the common liturgy of the free
Humans binded by DNA
Animals and plant life tangled together by strands of other
Coiled information passed lover to lover
We are children of the soil
Though dirt is not parentless
Mud has an origin
How far back should we go in our cosmic lineage
To the rushing asteroid
The scale of intergalactic connectedness is unmercifully huge
What could that mean
Somewhere there is something to be found
Space photography casts its net over silent places
Never been touched phases of beauty
Boils on the face of the universe
Like mountains used to be before.
Addressing the spaces between
You reference the gap in my brain
Which sits in the middle of chaos and order
Romance tries to lead an obstinate destiny
Head in the sand always right
Bashes the mystic back too frequently for it to be healthy
The substance in between has the quality of the whole
Which we ignore
Mist replaces mist in fresh confusion
When they dissolve
It will be so, again
All of us
Gradually going tornado
Spiralling in a ritual of evaporation
Until we induce a birthing of something ordinary
This is the massive small of universal truths
It doesn't matter we don't know what they are
Did we once know, in the fractured bliss of dreamtime?
We can't know
Yet I feel so strongly
My brain has contoured habitual hallucinations I do not wish to break
I am not the limit
Meaning shared beyond isolated
Tears tethered to tears take
the route most travelled on a stretched
and weary face
let's rejoice in the wet
healing of unstoppable grace
Ladders leading to ladders
Down to mud
Down to something vital
That essence shared
Walking through the valley
Eavesdropping a glut of languages
All mouthing a word like love

Don’t know why I won’t be lifted any longer
The shape of shadows
The light playing on the scaffolding outside my window
The crows call
All flounder without power
For the gusts of my spirit no longer register
The anemometer reads absent
I am frozen by parallax
The distance to home growing further
Annihilation beckons

Looking in the mirror changing faces
Everyone I have ever known rotating like bullets in the barrel of a gun
They dance together
Everyone in ice
Back to the mirror
Myself on myself wont shatter or get off my back
Hear a voice saying madder
Madder
Crying over the incessant creak of my bike
Me a tired break pad sat stubbornly in the way of the revolving wheel of life
Stuck and whirring wildly without resting place
Staring to a distant constellation
Toying with secret knowledge of a far-off home
Where we name the shuddering stars after our medication
Olanzapine twinkle Aripiprazole bright

Astronaut don't be so harsh on yourself
Testing reality relentlessly
Stars reflect off your helmets visor
Silver and blue explosions
The chemical composition of your tears melts through the armour of your space suit
You are an experiment in the spaciousness of infinity
Seek relatedness as your breastplate
The two-pronged rebuke pierces your side
Blood and water weigh less out here

This consciousness too small for deep time
Imagine being the planet
Already knowing the ending
Stuck watching
A life time stretched by regret
Flinch from the mechanics of a lie
What scales weigh the
Terrible monopoly of the heart
We shall teach robots morality so we can watch them fumble over the trigger completely
Rocking and moaning at lunch time  
The brightly lit cloakroom a dreary sanctuary  
Desperation infused with a smell of odd shoes  
This life does not fit  
I drizzle down corridors repeating ‘I cant cope’ over and over again.  
My inverted mantra that makes me smaller  
Like I expect the world to stop  
Surprised that it is not  
If you were to stare at my face you would draw from a dried up well  
Outstripped by the demands of love even the patterns in my eyes have changed  
The wisdom of presence lost to this glitter mind  
Light stretched too thin in these cosmic structures  

Andromeda is a rushing embrace  

Andromeda is a rushing embrace  
To save this schizophrenic heart  
Transcribe a year of tears  
A lexicon of grief sweeps for sense  
Swings to empty  
All stories dismantled  
Translated as numb
Perseverance gives birth to character and the child of character is hope
Illusive potency
I dream of animistic ritual
The desire to persevere is a panther in the jungle
In my uphill hunt and swamp wading I give warning
Yellow eyes in the shadows
Tribal shapes dominate
Crossing a threshold nearly
The allure of exotic drums will lead to oneness
Yet something won't let go
The leaves of the Wimba tree rustle like duvet covers on a restless bed
In hiatus I grope around for transfigured velvet
Looking for union in this world and some solution to evil
Snatch at those secret moments where despair is rushed by the wind and a quiet stampede of
strength bursts forth
Piercing eyes flashing once again
Become a conduit of life giving water
Channel hope
Breathe for the abyss

Daily I bemoan my loss of flow
Flail for synchronicity
The staff toilets now private panic room
The four walls squeeze inwards in unfeeling embrace
I whimper and rock on repeat
Stomp and shake my feet
Ask, how did it get to this?
Where is my escape route?
Where is rest
Though life continues beyond all points of resolution
or even climax
Charging ever on
Unyielding
Heart wrung out like a sponge
   A steady twist of nerves
   Teeming brain
   Rush of clouds
You have been fighting for me
   Holding the breach
Waiting for reinforcements which come as a dribble not a flood
   A faint reddish hue just below your right pupil
   Speaks of a voyage of pain

The world regurgitates a hundred hidden histories
   The unheard unearth and parade the night
Hope is dawning over the embers of anguish

I became a primordial galaxy
   A cloud of gas where I met God’s shadow
Epoch of dark halos each one mine to try on
   Cosmology as disobedient as gravity
   I wrestle the self
   Like Jacob wrestled God
For I do not know what I want to change
   I fumble every time I begin a heavenly arm lock
This talk of better is hard to manifest from misery
   Yet I will come out wounded
   Nursing new stars
   Destiny changed
Ideas like universal love harder to believe
   Yet never as pertinent
In moments an experience irrefutable
   Presence pulsating radially
   A giant stellar stream of longing
   So much opposed yet still joined
Dark lanes connecting an island universe
Astronaut let me whisper to you
The way the pillow talks at night
No words heard just urgency
The sound of stars running away
Secrets escaping
Instructions on the reassembling of self
Let me whisper to you
Of essential rock, the lichen green freshness of air
Do not forget the lovely dance of water
Let me whisper to you an echo
Twists and scars of the beech tree
The bristle and scent of moorland heather
Beaded glimpses of huddled rain
Poised on leaf, spiders web
On the wings of a moth

This is a love story that breaks through illness
That continues to hope
The narrative cannot end in isolation and embarrassment
Nor resist the pull of surging complexity
And the scale of beauty found there
The rocks are weightless and dancing
Remnants of faith linger like dust
A form of madness keeping life in my veins

**Tom Burgess** lives in Bristol, his work focuses on the environment, play and transformation. He is currently Head of Activities at Marlborough College School of English and Culture. Tom writes poetry and has a blog at [www.tompburgess.blogspot.com](http://www.tompburgess.blogspot.com)
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Suffering and pain are deep human experiences that demand our attention; they can be transformed into new forms within the context of psychotherapy. This article is founded on one of Plato’s famous myths referring to Eros as the movement of the soul towards the Good and Beauty (Symposium, 206e-207a) and we will link it to the gestalt key concept of the self as a process co-created (moving towards) in the contact boundary (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1980).

Eros (as related in the Symposium), has inherited poverty and absence from his mother (Penia) and also strength, desire, and wealth from his father (Poros). Eros is wealthy and poor at the same time and this duality allows him to move from what he needs (lack) towards the good and the beautiful (richness).

When pain is experienced without support from the environment there is total lack, therefore deep suffering. When there is enough support found in the environment, the experience of lack is also lived with sufficient energy and strength that moves the self. Pain (penia) experienced along with the support of the other (poros) invites the possibility of new creative forms.

Throughout this article we will explore and discuss different ways in which gestalt psychotherapy can develop a solid respect towards the dignity of the person who is suffering, within the context of loving and creative support (eros).

From our personal experience, as citizens of Mexico we are constantly dealing with suffering, situations that often involve many people. After the recent big earthquake in Mexico City, in September 2017, the resonance of the suffering field moved us very much, and at the same time we

“... only faith in the intrinsic ability of the human being to do the best thing possible at a given moment and in a given situation can direct the gestalt therapist towards being in the therapeutic contact and relationship”
~ M. Spagnuolo Lobb (2013)
witnessed human solidarity as a way of transforming this suffering into beauty, the presence of an-other human being supporting the personal struggles of those affected by the tragedy.

This situation led us to question our role as psychotherapists in facing the pain of our clients. As soon as we heard about the AAGT conference theme of Radical Respect, we felt that it could be very enriching to share these thoughts with other colleagues around the world through a workshop that we co-facilitated. In a sense, this article is the result of that workshop and the feedback from the participants at the last conference in Toronto.

When we let ourselves be touched by the person’s pain (“being aware of the presence of absence”), we can name the pain. This implies an acknowledgement of the dignity of the person. Her pain becomes our pain, the pain of the self. In this sense, the pain belongs to the field.

By naming the pain (penia) it becomes possible via the force of contact (poros) to transform the experience of pain into beauty, through the dignity of the relationship.

In gestalt therapy, “our epistemology is founded on the consideration that experience does not strictly belong only to the organism, nor only to the environment” (Perls et al, 1980). Therefore, suffering may be perceived and creatively expressed by the subject but it emerges from the contact boundary. The agent of this feeling (of all feelings), in this case pain, is the self, which is “the system of creative adjustments” (ibid.). The presence of this suffering can be felt by anybody standing in the relationship.

Taking into account that gestalt psychotherapy gives importance to the therapeutic relationship, it is necessary that the psychotherapist gives voice to the suffering of the self (field). In doing so, they make possible the emergence of a creative movement.

This creative movement is precisely ‘eros’ as love and compassionate attention towards the other.

When we anaesthetise pain we diminish our creative capacity. Therefore, the presence of the psychotherapist can be a powerful support in order to be aware of the poros (force) that can be found among the penia (pain). This is the loving act of the psychotherapeutic relationship.

The therapeutic presence (in ‘the between’) does not prevent the client from feeling his/her pain, but it dignifies it here and now, and prepares the person for the ‘next’ – whatever this will look like.

Throughout this article, we will be focusing on what Frank Staemmler (2013) calls pain as insult, which is psychological pain (different from physical pain). This pain implies suffering “when the aggression is perceived without experiential ground” (Spagnuolo Lobb, M., 2012).

As Gianni Francesetti (2015) says:

*Being aware of the presence of absence means: grasping and letting oneself be touched by the client’s pain – by her exhaustion at having borne it thus far, by her exhaustion at feeling it, and even by her past and present exhaustion at trying not to feel it, to anaesthetise it. (…) through the acknowledgement of the client’s*
pain, and thanks to the therapeutic love that this implies, the beauty and transformative power of the encounter comes to the fore.

PAIN

It is impossible to think about our human experience without recognising that pain is an important part of it. Although this is true, we experience pain in different ways depending on the circumstances in which it occurs. Whatever the case, pain forces us to experience our human limitations and constraints “in a most salient way”, as Staemmler says.

Staemmler argues that pain demands our attention in a contractive way, evokes self-centeredness and results in “personal regression”. Most of the time, it is very difficult to find the words to express our pain, so it easily leads to social isolation and introversion. Moreover, pain “triggers a strong inclination of avoidance” (Staemmler, 2013); it diminishes our creativity and weakens our capacity to go towards the environment and look for the possible supports that can help us to put up with the painful situation.

Staemmler states that:

Under the condition of serious pain, the self that can be defined as “the system of contacts at any moment” (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, 1951, p. 235, hereafter PHG) remains in touch with only a section of its possible contacts - the awareness of the pain being dominantly and unquestionably in the foreground. When in pain, we are compelled into what Schmitz calls “personal regression,” that is, we are forced into a Here and Now that we cannot escape easily. Under the condition of extreme pain, we are in danger of losing both our individuality and our dignity; we turn into a mere “picture of misery”.

Thinking of pain as a contractive experience, there is a sense of damage and risk to our own dignity and personal empowerment. This turns out to be an experience that takes a lot of energy and prevents us from getting enough resources from the environment that would help us to endure everyday life.

At this point it is very important to distinguish the different kinds of pain. Staemmler distinguishes two general types of pain: physical and psychic pain. In this article we are mainly talking about the latter type. Psychic pain can also be characterised in different ways: a) ordinary suffering, which has to do with experiences of frustration, disappointment, regret, etc.; b) grief (loss pain); and c) pain caused by insult, which includes those experiences of being or feeling offended, those situations in which one has the impression of not being seen, having the experience of being depreciated, etc.

For the purpose of this article, we are focusing on the pain caused by insult, which we think is unfortunately widespread in our societies, due to gender issues, racial factors, sexual preferences, economic factors, hate for political, religious and social reasons, etc. In our psychotherapeutic settings we routinely receive many people in deep pain caused by the increasing violence and insecurity of our societies. In gestalt terms we can say that the field is in a constant and increasing pain by insult. We, as psychotherapists, cannot be blind and deaf to this painful reality, which we ourselves also live. In a sense, the pain in the field is also our pain. Many of us experience this, but also most people experience it in complete
isolation and hopelessness.

What can we do to face this situation? Maybe we don't have the answer, but we can certainly explore possible ways in which we can co-create, along with our clients, new and creative ways of transforming the painful experiences into more loving alternatives. In order to explore these possibilities we will go back to the ancient Greek culture to explore one of the key concepts of this article: eros as love.

**THE MYTH OF EROS**

Five centuries before Christ, Plato wrote his philosophical *Dialogues*. One of these, called the *Symposium*, includes a beautiful myth explaining the origins of Eros, the god of love. Socrates, the main character in this dialogue, is sharing with the people the myth of a priestess called Diotima.

According to Diotima, as explained by Hyland, D. (1997), Eros’ ancestors are: its father, Poros (Plenty, Resourcefulness, or Contrivance); its mother, Penia (Poverty or Need); and its paternal grandmother, Metis (Wisdom or Craft).

Hyland states that the fact that Eros’ mother is Need reaffirms a fundamental lack in human beings, a need for fulfillment and a corresponding motivation to fulfill this need, to attain completeness. Being Eros’ father, resourcefulness gives it the means to overcome this lack.

Here a note from the *Symposium* (203c - 204a) in the words of Socrates:

*First of all, he (Eros) is always poor; and he is far from being tender and beautiful, as many* believe, but is tough, squalid, shoeless, and homeless, always lying on the ground without a blanket or a bed, sleeping in doorways and along waysides in the open air; he has the nature of his mother, always dwelling in neediness. But in accordance with his father, he plots to trap the beautiful and the good, and is courageous, stout, and keen, a skilled hunter, always waving devices, desirous of and inventive, loving wisdom through all his life, a skilled magician, pharmacist, sophist. And his nature is neither mortal nor immortal, but sometimes on the same day he flourishes and lives, whenever he has resources; and sometimes he dies, but gets to live again through the nature of his father. As that which is supplied to him is always gradually flowing out, Eros is never either without resources nor wealth, but is between wisdom and ignorance. (bolding is ours)

The idea of Eros being in ‘the between’ makes us think of the strength that the presence of the psychotherapist brings to ‘the client's pain’ (which we know is in the field, it is not only the client's). If a deep pain pushes the person into solitude and hopelessness, the presence of the psychotherapist can support a naming of the anesthetised experience (Francesetti, 2015), to listen to the un-named situation and to re-shape together the painful living. If we acknowledge, as Francesetti does, that suffering comes from absence in the field, the loving movement between the psychotherapist and the client can bring to the foreground new and creative options.

From a relational perspective, these new options can only happen at the contact boundary, as we explain in the next paragraphs.
CARING AS CREATIVE FORM IN THE CONTACT BOUNDARY

If we understand the contact boundary as the process of contacting that happens in ‘the between’ among the organism and its environment, the encounter that occurs among the psychotherapist and the client develops in the contact boundary.

In this sense, the erotic movement (in the between) in the psychotherapeutic setting, implies a deep act of caring (love). If we understand this movement as the movement of the self, we can observe the following stages in the process:

a) Presence (fore-contact)
b) Naming the pain (contacting)
c) Letting oneself be touched by the other’s pain (cf. Francesetti) (final contact)
d) Assimilation as creative adjustment: flowing organism/environment interaction that is not figure/background: the self diminishes (PHG, p.461) (post-contact)

We represent the process in the following graphic:

[Graph: "CARING AS CREATIVE FORM IN THE CONTACT BOUNDARY"

According to Staemmler’s ideas, it is in the between of the therapist and the client, where beauty emerges, as a new form (possibility) of the painful situation.

BEAUTY

Throughout the movement co-created in ‘the between’, the psychotherapist and the client transform pain into new options to deal with everyday life. The loving presence of the psychotherapist (erotic movement) evokes in the suffering client the experience of finding new and meaningful connections that help him or her endure painful situations.

In the psychotherapeutic setting there is an emotional movement, which can bring out the excitement and the being touched. When pain is shared, it gives the possibility of moving out into the world and transforming isolation through connectedness. It is through connection that pain can be transformed into a new form (into a new gestalt). This new form is beauty.

The following table provides an overview of the respective characteristics of pain and beauty (Staemmler, 2013).
Pain: Herald of Death  
Beauty: Promise of Happiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>demands attention</th>
<th>invites fascination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>contractive quality</td>
<td>expansive quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-centeredness</td>
<td>self-forgetfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal regression</td>
<td>personal widening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isolation, ineffability</td>
<td>connection, sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoidance</td>
<td>attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>introversion</td>
<td>extraversion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Staemmler says:

*Nevertheless, in spite of the numerous contrasts, there are occasions when pain can turn into beauty, and vice versa. On the one hand, for instance, emotional pain sometimes has its own aesthetic quality: the grief I feel over the death of a loved one may be as painful as it can be, and yet, if I accept it, it can take me to the truth of my deep connection with the deceased person that has its own tearful beauty. On the other hand, there is the forcefulness of the impression that something extraordinarily beautiful can be brought about: the passionate longing for a merger with that beauty can reach a climax which can be painfully intense and may even inspire the idea of wanting to die in just that moment of bliss. The Italian language, I am told, has an idiom that connects beauty with dying. One can find something so wonderful that one says: bello da morire [beautiful to die for].

As we said before, we understand beauty as the movement that occurs in the contact boundary in which the psychotherapist and client, together, find new and supportive ways to deal with painful situations. Beauty emerges with the awareness that allows the client to find new solutions every time.

Understanding love as a constant movement from lack to completeness (Eros as son of Poros and Penia), we think it is very important to view our psychotherapeutic practice as the co-creation of a new form which opens new possibilities.

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Weekend one of the gestalt therapy diploma at Manchester Gestalt Centre complete and it feels as if a new journey has really begun.

There I was, deeply immersed in the world of coppicing. I was in my element - woods, trees, logs, hurdle making, teaching. And then my physical ability to get up each day and shift trees from A to B was rudely curtailed.

A neurosurgeon wagged her finger at me and said “no more heavy lifting”. My world collapsed. There followed seven years of what seemed on paper to be the perfect solution - I offered my knowledge and skills to others in a consultancy capacity. I do love to walk around someone’s wood and give advice on management, both for ecological diversity and for productivity. I do not love spending days in my office on the computer wrangling with faceless bureaucracy, and became increasingly unhappy as a result.

I was at a particularly low point when I had a sudden flash of inspiration, remembering the debt I felt I owed to a very special gestalt therapist who helped me through a tangled patch of my life. I recalled an inkling that I could train in gestalt therapy. What a happy chance that a cursory google came up with the foundation course at Manchester Gestalt Centre. I had missed the first weekend, would they consider me? The short answer was yes, and what followed was a heady few months of immersion in all things gestalt.

The foundation year is a fabulous course. I loved the mix of group process, theory and practice. I would get connected in the group process sessions, have a sneaky snooze in the theory sessions, then get plugged in during practice. It is like connecting to the mains supply for me, I feel so totally engaged and switched on and alive.

With these hands I hope I can hold a space for healing
Don’t get me wrong, it’s not that I don’t value the theory, I really enjoyed reading up for the essays. It was a standing start for me as I don’t read theoretical books for fun. My knowledge of gestalt and the wider psychotherapeutic field was sketchy at best. I do know a good deal more now, but I had to admit in my interview that I will do what is necessary and probably not much more. I do not want to reside in my head; I am a hands-on person and, being stymied by my physical restraints, I am going to put my energy into creating a holding and healing space for others. This is my journey at present and I am so excited to be on it.

So what is the connection between the charcoal in the graphic above and gestalt theory? Charcoal is carbon, and carbon is found in all organic matter. As a compound bound with other chemicals it forms the building block of all life. Hence I use it to represent the ‘field’. Being so ubiquitous it also represents human history and culture, as we would never have left the stone-age and developed the societies and cultures that make up human diversity without charcoal to provide heat for the smelting of metal,
as the temperature obtained from burning wood in a raw state is insufficient to melt the ore. It also represents the trauma of war and aggression, being the key ingredient in gunpowder, and yet provides nourishment as a widespread essential cooking fuel.

I use fire to represent phenomenology. It is characterised in shorthand as ‘how we feel’ so using the imagery of a heart of fire evokes an interior world of emotion and sensation (not indigestion). In fact, phenomenology is a philosophy for the study of a range of seemingly subjective experiences, such as emotion and perception. In gestalt we want to know ‘how does that make you feel?’- it brings our awareness to our embodied experience. From smouldering embers to raging fires, we contain it all, yes, and ice and damp and dark, but these are not so visual.

Diamond is the ‘other’ form of pure carbon, along with charcoal and graphite (for pencils) it forms an unlikely triumvirate. Diamonds can symbolise so much, from heat and pressure to depth and greed, but here I have picked up on a positive side to diamonds – the flash of light - beautiful, fantastical and ephemeral. Like the dialogic holy grail of relating described by Buber so movingly in his essay of 1923, *Ich und Du*, in which he says how through I-Thou contact “each person realises most fully his or her distinct humanity”, this can also be a ‘peak’ moment in the therapeutic process (Mann, 2010). Now I am seeking out a placement and another exciting but scary bit of the journey will begin. I can’t wait.

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**Rebecca Oaks** has completed the foundation year at the Manchester Gestalt Centre and embarked on their diploma course. She lives in the Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, on the border between Lancashire and Cumbria, with her partner Amanda. She has a flock of Shetland sheep, a dog called Roxy and a new granddaughter.

In a previous life Rebecca has written three books: *Coppicing and Coppice Crafts*, *Greenwood Crafts*, and *Making Charcoal and Biochar*.

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JOURNEY TO THE EDGE OF MYSELF

by Ani Rainauli

“Before I sought enlightenment, the mountains were mountains and the rivers were rivers. While I sought enlightenment, the mountains were not mountains and the rivers were not the rivers. After I reached satori, the mountains were mountains and the rivers were rivers.”
~ Zen proverb (Cathcart; Klein, 2007)

CREATION: THE BIG BANG

I’ve always been so excited about the famous theory of the big bang, which just stuck in my head whilst being on an emotional roller-coaster during my teenage years and it continues to fascinate me today.

Why was it a big deal?

Actually, I’ve never asked myself this question. I just knew that it was or must be important and sort of postponed it for my older self to discover and rationalize why. I don’t blame myself for being so inconsiderate towards my feelings and emotions, because the actual experience that I really needed for my younger self was created and felt... the feeling that the big bang idea brought me was unexpectedly light and soft, it gave me connection to nature and brought up unconditional sensations in me.

If the universe had a beginning with a big bang, I experienced the same explosion in starting to feel, to realize, just in being generally. The explosion is the first step towards myself, which affects how I spread myself in me, in others and in environment, like matter was released and spread after the bang. I seized the day, I was as passionate as the poets in the movie Dead Poets Society. Actually, at that time everything was affecting me and shattering my emotions, new figures were being created and destroyed, leaving their pieces behind. No rationalization, just the feelings that were leading me in unknown directions.

There were lots of changes over the years, which I thought was logical and unavoidable. From high school graduation to my bachelor’s degree and then a master’s in clinical psychology, I had been doing all of this without a break and I really thought this was something I must do.
I read Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* when I was 19 years old. After that I felt different, without really being aware of it happening I started to gradually change my religious views. So, I was accepting these changes, and I was actually floating in the same direction as my life was headed, not really realizing my role in shaping it. I was waiting for some end to come, which meant that I would become mature and know all the answers (how idealistic).

But where is this end?

Subconsciously, I was waiting, waiting and again waiting, but I never really felt the destination was ahead of me. Now, as I’m living through my 25th year, still having these roller-coaster feelings and emotions, now I know nothing really ends when it comes to feelings and discovery of self. Something ends and other new things will emerge always. Waiting maybe was good and it was part of my life but I admit that, because of the waiting process, I was not really present in my life.

So, who owns my life rather than myself?

I found out that I was living in the future not in the present, and this idea struck me so hard in my head... this was my first collision with gestalt. Before gestalt I thought I knew everything but after gestalt I’m sure there will always be more to come, and this is exciting, this is fascinating, it is something to celebrate!

I had times (and I’m sure I will still have) when I was losing myself in black holes, where everything could vanish without a trace, but black holes are a phenomenon where physical laws that we know just don’t work! Let’s take a different perspective: the black hole is a kind of pure gravity itself! If I go deep into this, I will totally lose myself in me, in my own inner strength. So, when I search for the source of my problems somewhere outside, as I sometimes stubbornly still do, something always brings me back to myself.

But now I totally know, and I’m even more sure, that it’s okay to be a mess. It’s normal to be in chaos. So I just freeze this moment and

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**GRAVITY: THE SUPERMASSIVE BLACK HOLE**

*The ancient Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu awoke from a dream in which he was a butterfly, or, he wondered, was he really a butterfly who was now dreaming he was Chuang Tzu?* (Cathcart; Klein, 2007)

Being here and now is very hard!

It feels like I’m taking baby steps to newly learn how to walk in this reality.

It’s like I’m on Mars, lacking the gravity to stand more strongly on the ground. I really need more gravity to stand on the earth with both my feet.

Gravity is me; gravity is my inner strength, which I actually found and am learning to use.
experience it fully. With my body, with my senses, with my thoughts.

And yes, you are right! That's the thing gestalt can do for you. Or maybe it's better to say, you do it for yourself.

If I can find momentary peace in my personal supermassive black hole, than I can find the uniqueness in every experience of mine. Because now I know that every second I'm going through is unique and will never be experienced in the same form again. I like the idea of uniqueness, because it makes me appreciate every moment that I had, have, and will have in my life. Sometimes I find myself going back to the past or jumping forward in the future and it's so hard to maintain presence. But, as my precious psychotherapist Tamara Mamulashvili-Birch told me, as long as I focus on what I experience now whilst I'm thinking about past or future events, I'm already going back, and I'm being here and now!

THE SUPERPOSITION:
SCHRODINGER'S CAT

I've always wanted to be a creative person. I imagined myself as a writer, as a musician or even a painter. But I could never imagine that I could use this term so many times towards my everyday life, towards all of my actions and thoughts, intentions and desires, experiences and dreams. Gestalt itself is a creative process, which shows you that you are also a creative being by nature.

You don't have to make something that people call art. Living is an artistic activity, there is an art to getting through the day.
~ Viggo Mortensen

This is something that really touches me and always brings me back to gestalt.

I'm pretty much tangled into my polarities, embracing the sides that I denied or even didn't know existed before. Actually, I'm in my creative chaos trying to pull myself together. And when it's over, I know something new will emerge and the cycle will go on and on. I'm really happy about it, because I'm totally getting rid of my 'one final destination' sense and learning to experience the actual moment, like I did back when I was just 16.

But will I ever find myself in a superposition? Like Schrodinger's cat did. Because of the perspective of the observer, we can find this cat in a position where it's alive and dead at the same time (Revonsuo, 2010). There is one moment when you can be in the middle, in the middle of your own polarities, and this is the position when you actually embrace both of the poles and just not differentiate them anymore (Perls, 1969). This is the wholeness and the source of creative energy. That's why it's creative indifference. This is the superposition I would like to experience!

Back to now, my only client is myself, and that's where insecurities come floating to the surface... I'm 25 years old and the biggest struggle through my big bangs, supermassive black holes and superposition has been the realization that I'm too young, and lack the experience that comes with living (well, some of the creation needs some time at least). The responsibility to be someone's psychotherapist is huge and very pressing but exciting at the same time. It sounds a little scary, but actually this is the challenge that every psychotherapist can face. I'm working on creating something, some important support that will guide me through
this journey I’ve started. I really want to be a next Schrodinger’s cat.

I would like to speak to all the young and fresh starters in gestalt therapy and share my one year experience with gestalt. I hope you will find something in here that resonates with your own unique journey.

NOTES

1. Schrodinger’s cat is a thought experiment by Austrian physicist Erwin Schrodinger (November 1935). According to the scenario of this thought experiment, the cat can be alive and dead at the same time. This state is also known as quantum superposition.

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Ani Rainauli completed a bachelor’s degree and then a master’s in clinical psychology, and currently she’s in her second year of training at the Georgian National Gestalt Institute. She works at the New Vision University, Georgia, in the administrative office, and is providing psychological/counseling service for students. Ani loves studying new languages, which is like opening a new door for her. Besides Georgian, she is fluent in German, English and Russian, and has also been studying Spanish. She is keen on writing, since her early teenage years, and gets a lot of inspiration from her music. Ani loves to sing and plays guitar and ukulele, and enjoys traveling and meeting new people.

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STAYING WITH NOTHINGNESS TO ENTER FULLNESS: LEADING TRANSFORMATION IN THE VUCA1 WORLD

by Natalia Braun

Many of us have been realising that growth must not go on and that the growth imperative leads to a dead end and is killing the Earth: we need a completely new system.

“We need to build a world in which growth is unnecessary” (Monbiot, 2017)

How organisations are set up in response to this pressure to continually grow is neither effective nor healthy. Researchers are experimenting with new organisational models, and being quite successful at times. But by far the majority of organisations have not tried the new models. As long as the old system remains, its players have to be supported.

The world has changed since the era of the industrial revolution, when organisations and their leaders were used to exercising command and control. Laloux (2014) described such kind of organisations as “orange”, which he characterises by fixed hierarchies, being efficiency-driven and thoroughly infused by control. Static approaches to organisational management and development were the norm and worked well to some extent in the corporate and political world of closed countries and economies, clearly divided businesses, fixed and clear organisational structures, long-term or even life-time career planning, the prevalence of individual differentiation, and competition rather than team spirit.

‘To some extent’ means that it worked and is still working in many places in order to keep short-term control and support a few egos. Scarlett (2016) explains the crucial impact of neuroscience on organisations and their development in the way our brains react to threat – any change is seen as a threat,
getting in the way of our utmost goal: to survive. Subsequently, decision-makers in organisations followed this goal too, and employees followed the decision-makers. The former introduced static organisational development concepts and performance management systems.

For some time now, we have entered the new post-industrial era of the Information Age. This age has come to be known as a VUCA¹ world: a world where volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity prevail.

This development was caused by globalisation, the digital revolution, tremendous amounts of information and its speed, to name a few of the most impactful factors, and it has been happening not gradually but in thrusts. This has disrupted the status quo and made our brains struggle even more, as they are less and less able to satisfy their need to predict and protect.

Obviously following their protection instincts, organisations have kept going on and on with their control approach, believing that it will fix the problem if only they can control even more. I remember giving feedback to a high level HR executive, saying that forced ranking performance management is not serving business, but preventing it from being successful. The answer I got was that HR was not there to serve the business, but to follow the agenda of the HR HQ – a mix of motivational slogans with the objective of keeping control over the complexity from one central point.

We have arrived in the age of complexity. Complexity theory studies how non-linear systems such as social systems, neural networks, etc, are functioning and (self) organising (Cleveland, 1994). They possess a structure and continuity that prevent them from falling into chaos; they stay dynamic and flexible in order to balance on the edge of chaos. The higher development level of such systems is called ‘complex adaptive systems’ (Cleveland, 1994). They are made up of many individual actors in a self-organising manner and are characterised by autonomy, networks, and experimentation. Following the research of Laloux (2014), a bright example of such systems is the ‘teal’ organisation with its principles of evolutionary purpose, self-management, wholeness (people bringing their whole self to the organisation) – it is a living organism.

Gestalt highly correlates with complexity science. Some of its core principles are experimentation and creative adjustment. Gestalt's concepts and interventions were developed against the backdrop of the industrial age that was ruled by command and control approaches. Gestalt was part of a series of related movements that challenged that paradigm, and that have led to the emotional and intellectual crisis of today. It is based on the ideas of the philosophy of phenomenology and existentialism of Heidegger, Kierkegaard and Sartre.

I deeply believe that our age desperately needs gestalt. Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman (1951) considered their work to open the eyes and ears of the world, replacing ‘I’m telling you what you need’ with ‘I’m listening for what you want’ and thus contributing to the start of a rational discussion.

Gestalt's concepts are wonderful answers to many of the current organisational
challenges. In static change management concepts, the basic idea is to fix the change. One of the basic principles of gestalt is, on the contrary, the paradoxical nature of change. Change happens all the time. Living organisms change all the time. The paradox is to stay in the present and with who we are, rather than putting effort into becoming somebody or something else. Change then flows (Leary-Joyce, 2014).

Perls et al. (1951) put another important principle of gestalt in the following way:

*The greatest value in the gestalt approach perhaps lies in the insight that the whole determines the parts, which contrasts with the previous assumption that the whole is merely the total sum of its elements.* (p.xi)

This holistic approach is truly helpful in organisational development as it helps in embracing the whole picture (and not solely a select few of the organisation’s personnel).

Perls et al. (1951) call gestalt “a concept of growth”, where growth is meant as continuous learning and development, not as exponential growth. Connecting the dots with the insights of neuroscience and organisational development, organisations of today and tomorrow as complex adaptive systems are on a continuous learning journey, and we can greatly support them on the way. The good news from neuroscience is that our brains are continuously forming new neurons, and learning is highly beneficial to them. As Perls et al. (1951) state, “in our time the average person uses only about 10 to 15 percent of his potential”. We could help to get away from the solely protect-and-fight mode of organisational brains with gestalt, and thus contribute immensely to thriving in the VUCA.

It is a very insightful journey, but also a challenging one because it requires being true to one’s self and the ‘self’ of our organisations. It requires that we “invade [our] own privacy, …and observ[e] [our] self in action” (Perls et al., 1951). This is another basic principle of gestalt: self-awareness. Neurotic organisations often repress and suppress their authentic selves, leaving much unfinished business – many unfinished gestalts. Our endeavour as organisational practitioners is to help organisations, in particular their leaders, to become aware of how they are functioning as an organism and as a person (Perls et al., 1951). Perls writes further on developing self-awareness:

*Our strategy for developing self-awareness is to extend in every direction the areas of present awareness. To do this, we must bring to our attention parts of our experience which we would prefer to stay away from and not accept as our own. Gradually there will emerge whole systems of blockages which constitute our accustomed strategy of resistance to awareness. When we are able to recognize them in our behaviour, we shall turn to direct concentration on them in their specific forms and attempt to re-channel the energy with which the blockages are charged into the constructive functioning of our organism.* (p.82. Pronouns changed from original)

In this context, an insightful research and case study by Mias De Klerk (2007) comes to my mind which dealt with organisational trauma and its healing. Unresolved emotional trauma (or unfinished / incomplete gestalts) in many organisations block the capacity to be effective and the ability to perform. Different factors cause an organisational trauma, such as constant transformations without phases of stability in between. Each
minor loss can cause a trauma. According to Allen et al. (2001) and Baruch & Hind (2000) as cited by Mias De Klerk (2007), the accompanying symptoms are aggression, cynicism, distrust, higher absenteeism and inner resignation.

A case which benefited from gestalt-inspired interventions involved an organisation going through a significant change, facing issues connected with the loss of autonomy, chaos and a high level of uncertainty towards the future. At the same time, some sophisticated long-term hidden issues – unfinished gestalts – were coming to light. One such involved very strong team tensions, including a conflict between a manager and an employee.

The manager and the employee had quite different personalities, and a conflict came to culmination, which had been hidden for years. In a meeting, the employee got aggressive and the manager stayed apparently cool and distanced, as if he did not care. But something was not resonating with me.

When the employee left, I shared my sensations with the manager; I took a long moment of silence and asked how he felt in that moment. He burst into tears, and a very open, authentic and liberating dialogue started. It showed a true person with fears, vulnerability and a big heart. It freed up energy so desperately needed for living, working, breaking out of fears and taking a next step.

I was again very grateful to have come across gestalt which sharpened my sensations, made me more patient, able to stay in the here-and-now, to follow the flow, and opened my ears. As Leary-Joyce (2014) puts it so beautifully, staying in ‘nothingness’ led me to fullness; his metaphor of the fertile void fits so well with what happened. I used my only instrument – my self, I responded to my embodied sensations and enabled a big step towards creating self-awareness, closing a gestalt and helping the organisation to thrive instead of solely functioning.

To explain and reflect upon the topic of unfinished gestalts, I would like to quote Perls et al. (1951):

*In meeting the new situation, the old unfinished situation is necessarily suppressed: one swallows one’s anger, hardens oneself, pushes the urge out of mind. Yet in the new situation, the painful suppressed excitation persists as part of the ground. The self turns to cope with the new figure, but it cannot draw on the powers engaged in keeping down the suppressed excitation. Thus the ground of contacting the new figure is disturbed by the existence of the painful suppression, which is immobilizing certain of the ego-functions. Beyond this, the sequence cannot develop. (p.430)*

To accompany organisations and their leaders in going beyond that, “getting out of their own way” (Harrison, 2017), and facilitate their identification with their growing self (Perls et al., 1951) is our task as organisational development coaches and consultants.

How do we assist, facilitate and bring about healing? As ‘organisational doctors’, we observe, study and assess our ‘patient’ – we inquire. Our inclusion of the environment and simultaneous action into our inquiry is what distinguishes us as gestalt informed practitioners. Barber (2006) calls this being
‘a practitioner-researcher’. This, and the fact that we take into account not only the past but also the present and the future, differentiates action research from traditional academic inquiry, and equates more to artistic process (Torbert & Taylor, 2007). We become “researching artists as much as researching scientists” (Barber, 2006). Action inquiry is being “conducted simultaneously on oneself, the first-person action inquirer, on the second-person relationships in which one engages, and on the third-person institutions of which one is an observant participant... and it generates double and triple-loop transformations of structure, culture, and consciousness that influence ongoing interaction” (Torbert & Taylor, 2007).

Action inquiry directly relates to holistic inquiry described by Barber (2006):

One of the great shocks of the twentieth century came about when Science began to realize – largely from insights born from the study of ecological systems and quantum physics – that it could not reach an understanding of the physical world merely by collecting ever more quantitative data of statistical analysis. This was especially brought home when physicists discovered that solid matter started to dissolve at the sub-atomic level into wave-like patterns of probabilities. There were therefore no ‘things’ to be studied, but rather sequences of dancing gestalt-like patterns that interconnected with everything else. (p.14)

Gestalt-inspired holistic action inquiry includes transpersonal aspects and phenomenological patterns as well as contact, and implies staying in “moment-to-moment awareness” (Barber, 2006) whilst going through the gestalt cycle of experience. Torbert and Taylor (2007) mention four phenomenologically accessible territories of experience in action inquiry: the outside world, one’s own sensed behaviour and feelings, the realm of thought and the realm of vision, attention and intention. As gestalt-informed practitioner-researchers, we use our self as an instrument along with all the sensations arising during the inquiry gaining unique insights from staying present in the here-and-now. According to Reason and Bradbury (2001) as cited by Torbert and Taylor (2007), action inquiry is “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view”.

To end, I would like to quote Barber (2006) talking about different, holistic levels of what influences us as practitioner-researchers:

I believe these come together as I begin to embody the organisational field; that is to say, when I see and hear and relate to a group or organisation in a sensate and physical way; when I’m informed and shaped by the socio-cultural milieu that prevails; when my emotional history resonates with current events; when I am imaginatively impacted; when I am sufficiently open and in flow with the holistic field that it intuitively speaks to me. “A good traveller leaves no track” - Lao Tse. (p.240)

The sad truth is that after all this our clients often return to their realities that feed relapses into organisational trauma, as a consequence of the underlying economic system. In order to break this dead cycle with its inevitable interruptions, and make way for flow and serendipity, a change of our entire system is desperately needed. We have to embrace transmodernism, Cultural
Creatives² (Ray & Anderson, 2001) and innерpreneurship.

Otherwise our work as organisational and people developers will stay similar to the effect of aspirin: if prescribed to treat a headache without solving the underlying headache’s root, it will cause only a short-term improvement. After that, the risk of the relapse into self-cannibalism and self-damage remains quite high, both at the organisational and at whole societal levels.

NOTES & REFERENCES

1. VUCA = volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity

2. Cultural Creatives = according to Ray and Anderson (2001), an underestimated and non-organised but a big and growing number of people and companies worldwide that care about environmental protection, climate change, poverty and equality, are activists, treasure relationships and relational approaches, adhere to life-long learning, value spirituality and sustainability, reject both extremes in politics, are worried about the damage and dangers of big business and its greed and still maintain optimism towards the future, which they co-create by their example; their philosophy is contrary to that of neoliberalism and consumerism.


Natalia Braun is a gestalt and embodiment coach, consultant, researcher and journalist based in Switzerland. She grew up in Ukraine, where she studied philology, worked as a print and broadcast journalist, wrote poems and songs, and was engaged in theatre. During subsequent years of business experience in communications, change and HR management and development in Western Europe, she creatively adjusted to different sides of the corporate world. It was probably its dark manipulative side, and its obsession with control and fixing complexity, that brought her to gestalt. She got diverse training and certifications in gestalt, coaching, assessment and applied psychology, and continued her engagements in talent assessment, people and organisational development. She is currently writing her master’s thesis in psychology at a British university, where she is conducting phenomenological exploration of the influence of dance on embodied self-awareness and well-being. Natalia is a passionate dancer of various Cuban dances, which are very much about being in the here-and-now, being relational and with the joy of not knowing.

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THEY LEFT THEIR HOME AND HEARTH

by Greet Cassiers

Touched by the endless stream of refugees who have been forced to leave their homes in the wake of humanitarian disasters caused by war and climate change, I have painted those men, women and children who are lost and displaced in formless anonymity. They have no face, no voice, no name, but what remains is their story, so I also wrote some poems. It is an attempt to acknowledge their existence.

Originally written in Dutch, the whole series of 25 poems was translated into English by Meetje Swellengrebel, a friend and writer, and they’ve also been translated to French and Arabic. I exhibited the paintings and the poems side-by-side in both France and Belgium. This is also how they are presented in a booklet I published, entitled ‘They left their home and hearth’.

For the exhibition in Antwerp, I invited an Iraqi refugee and artist, Raid Alwasety, and we presented the poems in Dutch and Arabic, which was very touching. Visitors suggested I should put the poems to music, which I thought was a very nice idea. Several people who teach Dutch to Arabic speaking people bought them to use in their lessons, “because it is about them”, they said. I feel very happy with that.
I exist,
Even though
you cannot see me.

I am here and now
and eat your troubled conscience.
And sometimes,
I am
like acid bile so sour
in your throat.
Enveloped in blankets;
I am
with a woolly hat
drawn over my eyes.
Sometimes I disappear
for a wee while then.
I let myself be heard,
again,
but louder now.
I call your name and force you
to look me in the eye.
Because,
yes,

I do exist.

The crying,
it never ends.
The baby is screeching,
Hunger and cold
and a need
to feel safe.
I put my arms
around the child
and wait,
wait,
wait,
wait for arms
that embrace me.
My house is gone.
I left it behind.
Also the bed in which
I have born my children
and the blackened pots
of my grandmother.
I can still remember
how she prepared
the lamb’s meat;
the aroma, the taste,
I will never forget it.
I won’t forget either
how the cedar
threw it’s shade
onto our court-yard.
I warm myself on memories,
because my house is gone
and so is
my village,
my town,
my country.

Hunger,
cold,
insecurity,
not feeling safe.
Another three days.
And then,
a train,
a boat?
No, we stay.
We remain
despairing and
cold.
I am fortunate,
I still have my shoes,
and a jacket.
No woolly hat.
No, not my hat,
it’s gone.

‘Homesick’ - mixed media on wood, 21 x 29 cm

‘Empty’ - mixed media on wood, 21 x 29 cm
A small ladder to the heavens, that’s what I want. And then watch from up high on a little cloud my old country. To catch a glimpse of the cherry-tree, of the slim minaret, the meadow where the sheep grazed as always. My heart breaks. No sky. No cloud, nor a ladder. No glimpse of my old country.

My name is unknown. My voice is not heard. Anonymously I live within the crowd, disappear- Sometimes, another colour, a scream, a moan, a sigh. Wailing doesn’t help. I gave it up. When, when will I be offered a saving hand?
Greet Cassiers

As well as being a painter and poet, Greet is a gestalt therapist and international trainer working in Belgium and Nepal. In Kathmandu in 2011, Greet founded Gestal Institute Nepal, together with her husband, Ernst Knijff, and Frans Meulmeester. See more of her artwork here www.facebook.com/greetispaintingx-paintingisgreat
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Nothing.
No voice.
No colour.
No country.
Endless silence only.
Where can I go?

Not a human being on this earth who waits for me.
No desire
to live
anymore-
And yet-
I will live.
My children will see flowers and smiling faces.
They will play, jump,
learn to sing about how things were in the old country.
They will be glad and smile at me happily,
all misery forgotten.

'Lost' - mixed media on wood, 21 x 29 cm
The topic I have chosen to elaborate on in this article is particularly large-scale and, to my mind, is related to the history of humankind due to the fact that humans have striven for freedom from the beginning of times. The process of my personal liberation plays a crucial role in my development, in conjunction with my professional practice as a gestalt therapist. It is interesting to observe how gestalt therapy changes the attitudes of my clients, their relationship to their environments, and to see how they grow personally and overcome obstacles they meet on their way to personal liberation.

Coming from my specific educational background – I studied theology – I would like to present the biblical perspective on freedom because I think that the process of liberation, and the idea of freedom, underlies the paradigm of biblical history from Genesis to Resurrection.

If we take Genesis and the concept of creation, we can see that God grants freedom of will to humankind – along with the body and the soul with which He depicts his image and his likeness to humans. Moreover, God endows humans in Eden with two trees and sets certain conditions on how these are used, hence they signify what is important – freedom of choice, and responsibility for our choices, which basically denotes freedom.

Man made his choice: he ate the fruit from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, and was punished not because of his choice but because he didn’t bear responsibility for it – he imposed it upon The Creator, saying “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:12), and Eve said “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat”.

Ostensibly, freedom is not a vague notion ‘to do whatever I may’ but implies to have the

"Man is condemned to be free”
~ Jean-Paul Sartre
ability to choose and be responsible for this particular choice.

Punishment for Adam and Eve was due to their inability to respond. This seemingly simple biblical narrative illustrates that freedom is the ability to choose and to take responsibility for that choice.

Freedom applies to nations as well. Throughout history, social and ethnic groups have yearned for liberation but the due price is always very high. A person might not be aware of the price one has to pay for freedom, and hence, ultimately, may avoid it. I'll bring up another story from the Bible: when Moses released his people from Egypt's slavery, Israelites celebrated and were full of joy but the price they had to pay on their way to maintaining this freedom – to The Promised Land – was too high. They were not capable of paying the price so they imposed all the responsibilities upon Moses as he was their leader, the front man. They rebuked him for disappointing them: “What have you done to us bringing us out of Egypt? It would have been better for us to serve Egyptians than to die in the desert!” (Exodus: 14:10, 11)

The People of Moses deem Moses solely responsible for their liberation. They consider him obliged to pay the price that instead all 600,000 healthy men accompanying him out of Egypt must pay.

The price they have to pay for maintaining their freedom is forty years of wandering in Sinai’s desert. It is a price each one of them had to pay; each had to be responsible for their choice, and clearly, it was not an easy choice. The People of Moses chose to leave the land full of “fish at no-cost” and “cucumbers, melons”, their comfort zone, and to follow the path of liberation that lasts throughout their whole lives. The chosen path is each one of the Israelites' responsibility and the obtained freedom is not something Moses has delivered to them but is a process, something they have to go through by themselves. Freedom doesn't imply moving from one state to another, but is a process of liberation from rules, stereotypes, superstitions and traditions acquired in Egypt. It means breaking the patterns every time they face another obstacle – putting an end to wining and rebuking of Moses: “why did you take us from Egypt?”

After forty years of wandering in the desert, The Promised Land is reached only by those who take personal responsibility for freedom, those who are able to completely free themselves from experiencing the slavery, from the things that facilitate their slavery in Egypt.

Subsequently, the biblical concept of freedom is brought up by Jesus Christ, a God-man who makes this particular issue even more personal and shows us how personal liberation enables wholeness only if attended to at every single stage of life, and with a willingness to go through all the hardships and struggles accompanying it. Jesus was an illustration of how the ability to respond facilitates personal development. By living a humanlike life, submitting to crucifixion and resurrection, Christ gives us the example of personal development where the resurrection is a culmination of the process of liberation from a fallen state.

In existential philosophy, freedom and responsibility are concepts forever found in conjunction. Sartre's main ideology revolves
around the fact that a human being can never avoid responsibility, due to the fact that one is free. A person must be aware that he is the only one responsible for his choices, and even if he refrains from choosing, it’s still a choice: it is up to him to refrain. There is no delimiting, nor undermining of the domain of one’s personal responsibility. One cannot escape from responsibility. A person is responsible not only for himself, but for the environment he lives in and everything and everyone he is related to, as well as humanity and the whole universe.

According to Sartre, a person chooses the environment they want to live in, people they want to be friends with, and they choose foes, authorities or slaves even! Some are prone to believe in the universe’s randomness, some believe in its determination, others assume that God exists and some are just atheists. No matter, each person chooses to live in the world he selects from different options, and bears responsibility for everything and everyone. The obligations are due to the fact that a human being is free, and hence, it is hard to be one. That’s why Sartre asserts, “A human being is condemned to be free” (1946), so each attempt to run is doomed to fail.

Merab Mamardashvili, a Georgian philosopher who lived during the Soviet dictatorship, thought of personal freedom as the highest value of human beings and believed that it is not something easily obtained; freedom is hard to achieve and has to be chosen:

*To talk freely, to love freely is always punishable in society. Freedom doesn't imply swimming with the current. Quite the opposite – it involves courage, choice and decision. Freedom is like flying in a dream, demanding unbelievable effort. It is crucial to do something with yourself, to follow a certain path in order to handle the vast difficulties life has to offer.* (2011)

Mamardashvili asserts that man is endlessly co-created through history via his participation and effort. The uniqueness of a human being lies in the fact that each individual creation is constantly becoming. Man’s quest for life is enduring and everlasting. In his article ‘The European Responsibility’ (1988), he writes “A human is in a constant, unceasing attempt of becoming a human. It is a constantly evolving, creative state”. Freedom consists precisely in this creativeness or creativity. In this infinite process, a man is responsible for ‘creating’ himself – for becoming a human.

Nevertheless, there is one significant issue concerning freedom - I’ll make use of a quote to illustrate: “Your freedom ends where my freedom begins”. As a gestalt therapist, I will change the emphasis slightly and suggest that freedom for me is co-created with the other. Both parties contribute to creating the field they live in, and thereby freedom lies in co-creating this field.

Sartre elaborates on this topic saying that freedom of choice is an inseparable part of our responsibility towards others: “A man who is aware that he is not just a person who chooses his own self but is a legislator who chooses for humankind as well, cannot avoid his sense of responsibility for it (‘The Devil and The Good Lord’, 1951). In his screenplay ‘No Exit’, Sartre gives a hint as to his stance on this particular issue: the main characters – a betrayer and a cowed husband, a murderer of his own child, a prostitute mother and a lesbian are brought in to the same room in
Hell. Sartre implies that society consists of oppressors and victims, and that men hate each other, therefore the worst possible punishment for mankind is to make people talk to each other. The ‘other’ serves as a tool for self-identification: I exist due to the fact that others exist, therefore my freedom ends where others’ freedom starts.

According to Mamardashvili, freedom is to swim against the current. Erich Fromm resonates with this idea in his article ‘Escape from freedom’, saying that freedom is accompanied by loneliness, helplessness and ostracism, therefore many people give up on freedom and suppress their individuality.

Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility. Submission is a way of avoiding freedom according to Fromm, for instance, by obeying a leader: “Some run the world while others follow them, asking - where are we heading to?” (1941). Parallel to this, Fromm talks about ‘comfort zones’ – it is easy to be in one and to pass the responsibility to someone else by action or inaction, complaining about the circumstances but doing nothing to resolve them: “it is easier to be nobody rather than to be free” (ibid). So, instead of failing or being criticized and judged, we'd rather shut our eyes and ears, and be nobodies.

American intellectual, Brian Tracy, speaks up and encourages people: “Move out of your comfort zone. You can only grow if you are willing to feel awkward and uncomfortable when you try something new. Freedom is totally worth it.” (quoted by Kakabadze, Z.,1988).

Losing freedom leads to losing a sense of self. Freedom doesn't imply separation from the environment we live in, but it means being fully present in the world with our capacities, choices and responsibilities.

**GESTALT ON FREEDOM**

We have come to the main part – what is the gestalt perspective on freedom? Although gestalt therapy doesn't postulate any definite concept on freedom, in my opinion, liberation is gestalt's essence. Gestalt therapy's most important tenet relates to identification of the capacities a person has, what is his/her state in the present moment, here and now, what is their choice and their responsibility for that choice?

In gestalt therapy, awareness means sensing our inner selves, sensing our bodies, our emotions and what they have to say – how is it to feel the constant stream of these sensations, needs and desires? Creative adjustment is the best way of adapting needs to the constantly changing environment. Developing creative adjustments is the essence of gestalt therapy. One must be able to feel the feelings inside in order to adapt. This is awareness. By becoming aware, one is enabling the most fundamental sensations to enter the stream of consciousness. For instance, I notice tension in my muscles, hence I become aware that I’m tired and need some rest, but if my enthusiasm wins over I may neglect my fatigue. Therefore, creative adjustment is a regulatory tool that balances my needs with resources in the environment. PHG (1951) talk about one kind of creative adjustment which they call ‘conservative’ – i.e. related to ordinary physiology concerning basic vital functions; another type of creative adjustment is to do with growth – and this we will never be able to fully satisfy.
The vitality of a human being is based on two main types of needs: (1) a need to maintain stability; survival in order to not to merge into the surroundings, and (2) a need for change, to break the balance and for new experiences that serve development and growth. PHG's idea that growth is possible only through assimilation, and it's the only way towards something new, reflects the idea that creative adjustment facilitates self-discovery.

Awareness helps a person in emancipation from past patterns, in order to create a basis for the new. In order for something new to emerge, first we must be ready to deconstruct the old. In some cases, an individual is able to assimilate unfinished gestalts but, often, unfinished cycles remain as open wounds and block energy, and this leads to disturbances in equilibrium. Gestalt therapists must pay attention to the repeating contact-hindering mechanisms as well as developing need-satisfying processes.

Getting rid of unwanted introjects enables an individual to stop engaging with activities that don't correspond to his needs. Therefore, a gestalt therapist helps a client to learn how to ‘taste and grind’: an individual needs to reassess what seems to be useful in order to integrate or extrude it.

In this process, the therapist's function holds a lot of importance in regards to freedom and responsibility. It is important for the therapist to be aware of their own boundaries, and their freedom and responsibility. The therapist's freedom is largely defined by his/her function in the field where the therapist-client relationship is the main figure. The definition of the field depends on the therapist's awareness of the field.

The therapist's freedom implies his/her ability to choose and is related to responsibility for their impact as well as their flexibility (capacity to choose). “Freedom is an ability to respond in certain situations. It doesn't mean to be free from something but to be free to do something” (Knijff, 2011).

Our freedom is conditioned by given situations and by choices we make in those situations (background, body, conditions and so on). “Claiming that a fish's function is limited to just water is not understanding what it is to be a fish” (Knijff, 2011). Hence, “freedom doesn't consist of being free from the field or the situations we find ourselves in, but it is the ability to respond to the field or the situation”. “freedom is ... being able to respond to the specific situation. It is a condition, not a limitation” (Knijff, 2011).

Therefore, it is important for a therapist to help a client not to escape the situation or the field they live in, but to help them be present in given situations and be fully responsible for the choices and the functions they have.

Responsibility means acknowledging self as an individual creator of events. Responsibility is an attribute of existentialism simply because it is a result of liberation. Hence, it is not only an opportunity but the source of anxieties, due to the fact that in the case of failure one cannot escape awareness or make excuses for failing. In his first work, ‘Ego, Hunger and Aggression’ (1947), Perls puts emphasis on the significance of the existential attribution mentioned above, using only the first person singular form to describe the action (behavior) and suggests we speak in the following manner: instead of saying “I have dropped the cup”, he suggests
we say “a cup has dropped from my hands”.

Responsibility kicks in when a desire emerges and freedom of choice is possible. The process develops in three stages:

1. Emergence of a desire - we are free to say yes or no to it. We either proceed to fulfill it or decide not to, or we may avoid the responsibility for it and repress the desire in order to avoid the difficulty associated with the decision making – “to make a decision is to partially die” (Mascolie, 2010. P.70-71)

2. We may disclaim freedom of choice and pass it on to another – a leader, front man, or a priest who will guide us and tell us what’s good or bad, what is allowed and what’s not.

3. We may strive for fulfillment of our desires but be frightened of taking chances for fear of failure. This strategy often leads to depressive experiences.

In some cases, responsibility leads to feelings of guilt. Feelings of guilt can be interpreted in different ways: a person either takes responsibility for failures he is responsible for, or he blames himself for things he hasn’t done; also, he may feel responsible for all kinds of sufferings in the wider field.

Often an individual starts therapy because he was referred by a friend or a family member, whereas he himself is not aware of ‘what he is doing here’. In this case, a client finds it hard to take responsibility for the choice he is actually making in bringing himself to therapy. We can focus on feelings of guilt during the sessions and bring up things that, in the end, may prove the rightness of his choice. A therapist may also pay attention to his desire and try to remobilize it. Questions such as “how do you feel now?”, or “what is your body telling you in relation to this?” and “what is happening to your breathing?” bring awareness to bodily sensations and breath, promoting remobilization of desire.

Responsibility is distributed to both client and therapist in a therapeutic relationship. It is an ‘I-thou’ relationship, where the therapist pushes both himself and the client to take responsibility.

As I’ve already mentioned, in gestalt therapy everything is based on awareness, which discloses information related to the client’s inner-self and the external world to both the therapist and client. Awareness embraces external stimuli, as well as sensing inner organic processes, sensations, images, memories and excitements, etc.

According to gestalt theory, psychological issues arise when awareness of reality is substituted with rational concepts and false fantasies, polluting the reality one lives in and hindering the need-satisfying processes. A person can independently resolve problems only by becoming aware of both inner and outer realities. Therefore, the purpose of therapy is not to change action (behavior); behavior changes along with the enhancement of awareness. So, we can say that therapy is a way of liberation out of false fantasies and stereotypes that enables personal growth. Awareness is related to responsibility: the more a person becomes aware, the more responsible he becomes for his own life, or his own desires and needs, as well as his actions, feelings and freedom in general. Using Fritz Perls’ words “a person leans on his own self” (Gronsky, 2008, p.94-170), we could say that Perls deemed true responsibility to be a result of awareness.
The topic of freedom is also related to acceptance of one's self just the way one is. In the therapeutic context, processes of self-acceptance need to be supported. This is related to the ‘Paradoxical theory of change’ (Beisser, 1970). Change happens when a ‘nobody’ becomes who he truly is, rather than when a person tries to become someone he inherently is not. Change occurs not by forcing a client, nor by the client forcing his own self, but by focusing time and energy on being who he is and by involvement and attunement in the present state. To my mind, becoming aware is the “constant act of creating ourselves” (Mamardashvili, 2011).

By giving up on being a creator of change, we open up to the possibility of emergent change. In this case, the gestalt therapist is not a ‘changer’ but is a supporter of a client in being where he is and who he is. Change cannot happen by means of will, or force, or convincing or interpreting or any other means. Change happens only when a client gives up on being false and starts to become who he truly is. The pre-existing condition for change to occur is that the client must be in a certain place where he can lean on a support that facilitates these dynamics.

THE FIGURE OF THE CLOWN

When I first started to work on this article, and started to think about what gestalt therapy means to me and how it serves my liberation process, one of the most important figures that emerged was a representation of the clown – a persona emancipated from everything. It was an important discovery for me to see the similarities of the clown and the child, and the overlap of these in the Gospel of Mark where Christ meets the children:

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked him. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it'. And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Gospel of Mark 10:13-16)

A child is a person who is not fully developed, has not yet acquired qualities attributed to a mature person and has no capacity for independent thought, speaking or working but despite this, Christ, a representative of the highest level of fundamental existential ideology, is not disturbed by their incompleteness. On the contrary, he rebukes his disciples and explains to them that the essence of his teaching lies in ‘consecrating the incompleteness’ in order to complete what is yet incomplete.

Incompleteness of a child is the main resemblance to a clown, except for one thing: even though he is naïve and unsophisticated a clown is not pure, nor innocent, and certainly he is not guiltless, because the presence of concepts such as purity and innocence in and of themselves presumes the knowledge (presence) of the opposite - the impurity or the crime.

Maturity, though, is the privilege of those who have tasted from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. The clown is the one who has liberated himself from the burden of this knowledge and, hence, is shameless. Much like a child, he is naïve, trying to get the essence of things around him, he is gullible and trusting. When a rope is pointed out
him and he’s told it is a snake, the clown jumps in fear; if instead the rope is presented as sweets, he starts to lick it. Just like a child, the clown is unable to reflect (to look inside) and is simple. The clown stumbles while walking wearing his huge shoes; he is clumsy and shy; he is like a child who has already grown up and shows himself to a mother, but is never ashamed of himself (Knijff, 2011).

The reason clowns cannot imitate children, and vice versa, is that clowns are just like children and children are just like clowns. Children show such enthusiasm for a clown because they recognize him in themselves.

Their fun is caused by a recognition of the misery of life ‘in between’ adults – a life where children themselves constantly fall down and have to get up again. A clown is clearly recognizable as an adult with a bald head, large nose, and a body that is just as clumsy as a child’s. The clown and the child don’t live the illusion that something needs to be perfect because they don’t know what perfection or imperfection is, because they are not aware of differences between ‘I’ and ‘self’, because they do not retrofect, because they do not divide world into light and dark, innocence and crime, complete and incomplete, fool and wise man. They are not aware of morality and they don’t strive for perfection. Incompleteness implies future possibilities, a liberation from ‘ego-spasm’, and this is how a clown can be a great therapist. On the one hand, clownesque can be liberating and therapeutic, but on the other hand, it pulls a small audience. In the story of Jesus, the people weren’t exactly piling up to meet the ‘clown’ Jesus; people didn’t seek him out because he was known for his naivety back then, rather, people went to him so they could project their own divine wisdom onto him.

People look for someone other who may fulfill their quest for completeness and perfection, for people they can look up to – ‘gurus’, in a word. Similarly, therapists too are put on a pedestal (literally – into heaven) because of this wish, and as soon as this happens their work of healing becomes disabled. Being a therapist is not a role in a play about social welfare, but a function in a strictly defined relationship. As soon as the therapist starts to resemble the caricature of ‘guru’, he will undermine this figure in the most loving way. Immediately, he picks up the projection and pricks a hole in the bubble of the guru (deflates the inflated rubber-gum) to show his true nature, an illusion. By this action, he returns to his clients what initially belonged to them already.

So, “he who doesn’t enter the kingdom of Heaven as a clown, certainly will not enter it” (Knijff, 2011).

Gestalt therapy for me as a therapist and as a client, and as a person in general who has invited the spirit of gestalt into my life, is a very important process of liberation. The first five years of my gestalt education have brought me an awareness of my own needs, sensations and my surroundings. Gestalt has given me an opportunity to find my private freedom and made me more courageous. I have also become more fully aware of the responsibilities for my choices, both in my personal and professional experience. When I think about all of this, I recall the image of a chrysalis. To me, the liberation process is like the unfolding of a chrysalis that may not look so attractive from the outset but later gives birth to a wonderful butterfly. The butterfly starts to fly only after ridding itself of its rough coat – then it becomes amazingly beautiful and super light.
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