

Belonging and Self-Regulation in Gestalt Psychotherapy



Looking across the diverse articles in this issue and reflecting on the common thread that connects them, it seems to me that the concepts of self-regulation and belonging provide that unifying theme. One interfaces with the other, and vice versa. The experience of emotional self-regulation which neuroscience and the neurobiology of attachment now explore in depth (see for instance: Siegel, 1999; Shore, 2025; Tronick, 2007; 2008) forms the foundation for developing a consistent, coherent, and stable sense of self in the face of stressful situations. This sense of self is both grounded in and supportive of secure, thereby fostering a sense of belonging as an intimate and social experiential category. We feel a sense of belonging toward what gives us a sense of security and with which we identify. For several years now, the HCC Italy Gestalt Institute has been exploring these themes, to address the relational suffering of our times, using the therapeutic categories specific to our approach: the process of contact in the therapeutic relationship, the co-creation of the contact boundary between therapist and patient, the therapist's field and aesthetic intuition, and the vitality inherent in all suffering.

The issue opens with the "Presentations" section, featuring a translation of an article by Thomas Fuchs, "The Interactive Phenomenal Field and the Space of Life: A Sketch of an Ecological Concept of Psychotherapy." The decision to translate and publish this article stems from the rich dialogue, full of connections and opportunities for growth, that we have established over the past couple of years with Professor Thomas Fuchs, a philosopher and psychiatrist at the renowned University of Heidelberg, long associated with Jaspers. The concepts of field, situation, ground, and resonance resonate deeply with us, almost serving as a form of independent confirmation. Furthermore, it is clear how our construct of aesthetic relational knowledge (Spagnuolo Lobb *et al.*, 2024) can describe, in neuro-phenomenological terms, the therapist's intuition regarding the implicit modalities of the patient's being-in-the-world. This is evident in a recent exchange, an interview with Professor Fuchs conducted during the March 20-21, 2026 conference organized by the Italian Society of Gestalt Psychotherapy (SIPG) at the Ara

Pacis in Rome, which will be published in upcoming issues. As the author puts it: «The phenomenal field is thus centered in the lived body, which functions as the background of all experience, and as the medium of one's relations to the world» (p. 106). And again:

The patient's habitual or implicit ways of relating to others are reenacted in the "here and now" of the therapeutic relationship and may be changed through new experiences. In such a view, it is not so much the explicit past that is in the focus of the therapeutic process but rather the implicit past which organizes and structures the patient's phenomenal field of relating to others. As we have seen, however, it is frequently not a concordant but rather precisely a nonexpected behavior of the therapist which allows the patient to make a corrective relational experience and to break out of ingrained behavior patterns (p. 116).

The Gestalt experiment (see Pino, 2021) can well be equated with this "unexpected behavior" to which Fuchs attributes therapeutic change, and which I define as a "bold step" in the "dance steps model" (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2020).

In the "Gestalt in Action" section, Matteo Limiti, in his article "Love Addiction and Post-modernity: The Crisis of Belonging" asks: "What is the point of talking about emotional dependency today, in a society dominated by excessive individualism, the struggle to maintain relationships, and a focus on the 'I' rather than the 'we'?" The author uses sociological categories of postmodernity to understand the phenomenon: "We are all freer, but also lonelier, deprived of the affiliations that provide security and a sense of belonging to a shared history". In this historical context, emotional dependency is defined as a pathology of belonging. After exploring two different types of emotional dependency, the author describes the clinical presentation of this disorder and the therapeutic process, citing two clinical examples. Finally, he traces this relational suffering back to a crisis in the very meaning of love, which (quoting Galimberti) can no longer be understood romantically as a passive process in which one receives but must become care for the other – not receiving but giving.

In the Research section, Gabriele Curcio and Serena Iacono Isidoro present a single-case study: "Breathing as a Relational Tool in Gestalt Therapy: A Single Case Study". Despite the described limitations of single-case studies, this research demonstrates how breathing can support the organization of the therapeutic experience by accompanying the positive changes perceived by the patient. The article also serves as an exemplary model of research conducted by a fourth-year student using the single-case method from a Gestalt perspective, supervised by a trainer.

In the Studies and Applied Models section, Noemi Rovetto presents the

article “The Therapist’s Experience in the Painful Fields of Psychotherapy”, which explores how to phenomenologically describe the therapist’s experience when confronted with the patient’s suffering. By analyzing the responses of 22 therapists to a specially designed questionnaire, the author identifies common dimensions and broad categories. For example, in response to the question “How would you describe your emotional experience when you are in contact with your patients’ pain?”, she identifies shared experiential dimensions concerning: personal involvement and empathic participation, bodily arousal, respect for others’ pain, and the balance between empathy and professional detachment. This article prompts all therapists to reflect on the shared experiences we all have when faced with our patients’ pain.

Finally, in the “History and Identity” section, Monica Pincirolì speaks on behalf of the SIPG (Italian Association of Gestalt Psychotherapy) with Anna Rita Ravenna (Florence Gestalt Institute), as part of the series of interviews with leading Italian figures in our approach that we have been publishing in this journal for the past few issues. Reading the author’s words is a very pleasant and vibrant experience: an example of Gestalt psychotherapy in action.

In the Reviews section, Michele Cannavò presents and comments on the book *A Gestalt Therapist’s Guide Through the Depressive Field: Giving Way to Hope* by Jan Roubal, published in the Gestalt Therapy Book Series, edited by Gestalt Institute HCC Italy and published by Routledge. The author addresses the vast topic of depression from the perspective of the therapist’s experience, a fundamental subject in relational approaches.

In the Conferences section, Francesca Gonella and Virginia Engolini describe the international conference with Carmen Vázquez Bandín titled “Rediscovering Humanity Through a Sense of Togetherness: Gestalt Psychotherapy in the Treatment of Everyday Suffering”, held in November 2025 in Milan.

Iside Polizzi, on the other hand, reports on the conference “The Child Within and Without. Focusing on the Essentials in Gestalt Psychotherapy”, held in Mondello (Palermo) on February 13 and 14, 2026. Both conferences were organized by the Gestalt Institute HCC Italy.

Reflecting on all the articles published in this issue, I am particularly struck by how the colleagues who wrote these two reports managed to translate the experiential intensity of the conferences they participated into a verbal narrative, without losing the immediacy and depth of that experience. It is one thing to have an experience, after all, and quite another to recount it, as Sartre reminds us. But managing to integrate the two is an art.

It seems to me that the processes of self-regulation and belonging are

linked to the ability of choosing words that emerge from bodily sensations, rather than from purely rational processes – as Goodman describes in Chapter 7 of *Gestalt Therapy*, “Verbalizing and Poetry”. When we are fully present at the contact boundary with another person, the words that emerge speak to us of the body and aesthetic experience, reaching a level of communication that is unique to poetry. This skill, however, requires a sense of self-regulation and belonging.

This is a task that every psychotherapist faces when seeking to alleviate a patient’s suffering: words are powerful regulators when they give meaning to what is happening. As therapists, we are called to engage in bottom-up work – tuning into emotions and creating a new narrative that preserves the vitality inherent in every perceived pain and every trauma.

All the articles in this issue speak to us in some way about this art.
Enjoy the read!

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