Masterclass:
‘Absence is the bridge between us.
Gestalt Therapy approach to depressive experiences: a clinical and social perspective’.

Masterclass

Depression is a very common suffering: according to the W.H.O., it’s the fourth most urgent global health problem and by 2020 it will have risen to second place (after only cardio-vascular diseases). What does it mean such a huge increase in our society? Are we co-creating a social depressive field?

The depressive experiences have a range of different manifestations that require different treatments and support. It is important for the therapist to know how to distinguish them and to be oriented in working with these sufferings: what risks, resources, tools, therapeutic position, attitude and relationship s/he has to be able to consider in order to work with this ‘contagious’ experience?

During the masterclass we explore depressive experiences from a Gestalt therapy point of view: we will move towards a phenomenological and field perspective in order to reach a radically relational understanding of this suffering and some directions for the therapeutic journey. Theoretical frames and practical experiences will be offered and discussed.

Keynote speech

Gestalt Therapy approach to psychopathology.
A clinical focus: the depressive fields.

In the last years we have been experiencing, in the Gestalt community, an increasing interest in psychopathology: articles, books, specific training programs, conferences are flourishing more and more. This can be seen as a development in our theory and practice: during the humanistic movement, from the’50 to the ’70, to which GT contributed significantly, there was the need to criticize psychopathology and diagnosis, and especially the way they were used and misused for labelling and stigmatizing people. This had the great value to give strength to the dignity of every human experience and suffering. But also, it supported an attitude of isolation from the dialogue with other approaches, with psychiatric and academic worlds and from contemporary developments. In the last years, we have observed a new trend: Gestalt therapists have started to enter in the field of psychopathology and diagnosis with a new attitude, that is not only to be against the objectification but also to create
a specific gestaltic way to explore psychopathology and diagnosis. This exciting and fruitiful process is having some consequences and results: to be more aware and accurate when we meet the clinical suffering in our therapy room; to be able to approach severe clinical sufferings; to understand better the interconnection between individual suffering and the social and cultural field; to bring to the wider world of psychotherapy and psychiatry a specific, original and unique Gestaltic way to approach psychopathology; to further develop our theory and practice remaining loyal to our foundational epistemology.

In this speech I introduce the concept of psychopathological field to move from an individualistic psychopathology towards a radically relational one. I try to describe the concept by tracing its roots, which lie deep in Gestalt psychology, in Gestalt therapy and in phenomenology – in its classical and new-phenomenological formulations and in its derivations in psychopathology and psychiatry. And we will describe the connections between psychopathology and an aesthetic attitude in Gestalt therapy. Taking the subject of psychopathology to be the field instead of the individual opens up a radically relational horizon, with significant implications for both clinical practice and therapy. This perspective on Gestalt therapy seeks to remain faithful to its epistemological roots while tuning in to the developments and needs of contemporary psychotherapy.