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Editorial

In 1993, Gaetano Kanizsa, the great Italian scholar of perception, one of the last exponents of the Gestalt school, passed away. Every year since, his students at the University of Trieste have organized the Kanizsa Lecture to honor his memory. The lecture is given each time by an eminent scholar of perception – among others, Mingolla and Ramachandran, Koenderink and Gilliam, Todorović and Caramazza, Wagemans and Spillmann. In 2015, the 19th Convention of the Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications (GTA) was also to be held in Italy – in Parma – and so the organizers decided to unify the two events, and to host the 23rd Kanizsa Lecture at the GTA Convention. The speaker was Vittorio Gallese.

Gallese, Professor of Physiology at the University of Parma, is famous for discovering in the '90s, together with Giacomo Rizzolatti and Leonardo Fogassi, the *mirror neurons*. In his lecture, with which we open these proceedings, Gallese notes that the observation of the world around us goes far beyond simple visual perception. If our interaction with the world involves not only the visual areas of the brain, but also the motor, somatosensory, and limbic ones, then we must approach the relationship between perception and action from a new and more widely integrated perspective.

Coming to those papers presented at the GTA convention, we can roughly divide them into: i) papers which properly pertain to the history or research methodology of Gestalt psychology; ii) papers dealing with research or theoretical topics of Gestalttheorie, or otherwise connected to it; iii) papers facing problems of psychopathology in terms of Gestalttheorie.

The contribution of the historian of philosophy Stefano Poggi belongs to the first category. He tracks the origins of Gestalttheorie in German-speaking culture up to Goethe, reviewing the ideas of Mach, von Ehrenfels, Hering, and Stumpf. Of course, we have already read many pages of these authors as precursors of Gestalt-

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theorie. Poggi's paper provides a new and important perspective, by emphasizing some aspects of Goethe's thought that contributed to overcoming the inability to see the complexity of our perceptual world,.

Still strictly historical is the work of Serena Cattaruzza, which focuses on Bühler, an author who has never been Gestaltist, but who worked in close proximity with the phenomenological setting of German psychological research at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cattaruzza's focus is Bühler's theory of expression, and his relations on the one hand with physiognomy (up to Ludwig Klages, a contemporary of Bühler), and on the other with the theory of perception. Among the works of Bühler, the theory of expression is one that has so far been neglected, unlike those on the "crisis of psychology" and the theory of language, but, as Cattaruzza persuasively demonstrates, it deserves great attention.

Of historical interest is also the work of Alice Pugliese, moral philosopher at the University of Palermo. His work deals with an issue that is only marginally close to the main interests of the conference, but that is nonetheless illuminating in regard to a full understanding of the spirit that permeated German culture in the years immediately preceding the birth of Gestalt psychology. Pugliese is analyzing an important work of Dilthey, to date unpublished: his lecture of 1890 on expression, at the University of Berlin. In this work, expression is seen as a dynamic foundation of inner life, but also in connection with "forming ethics", and then as a fundamental basis of social life.

Let's go now to the experimental or theoretical papers. Alfredo Vernazzani, a young Italian researcher working in Bonn, is interested in cognitive neuroscience, and focuses his paper on the concept of isomorphism. This is understood as a structural correspondence between the phenomenal world and the neural substrate, and Vernazzani proposes a revision of the concept in terms not so much of content-content matching, but rather of content-mechanism matching. He thus shows that even on a theme so widely debated one can still say something new and interesting.

Michael W. Stadler turns his attention to the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, a "guru" of the New Age movement (which Stadler, however, carefully avoids mentioning), whose ideas were certainly influenced by Gestalttheorie, but are quite far from a proper scientific field. Stadler's work, however, is interesting especially with regard to the concept of secondary and tertiary qualities, and in terms of the historical analysis to which Stadler submits them.

Riccardo Luccio critically analyzes the concept of experimental phenomenology, as introduced by Michotte, which has become popular in recent decades thanks to Paolo Bozzi. According to Luccio, the expression should be banned, and this field of inquiry would be better designated as "phenomenological research". The

word “experimental”, in fact, has now acquired a more precise and in some ways narrower meaning than at the time of Michotte, and “experimental phenomenology”, when having full scientific dignity, does not fulfill the requirements it should to be designated experimental.

Shelia Guberman, in the US since 1992, worked for a long time in Russia developing mathematical models in different fields, from Artificial Intelligence to Geophysics. He is currently engaged in studying the principles of Gestalt psychology, and with the possibility of using them in programming. In his contribution, Guberman turns his attention to the problem of the mind-body relationship, and, considering “imitation” as one basic principle of Gestalt psychology, he sees in the mirror neurons the key to understanding how the perception of static models is transformed in dynamic processes.

The work of Walter Coppola, Audio-Psycho-Phonologist in Trieste with a history of a lyrical career, is inspired by the controversial theories of Alfred Tomatis, French audiologist now dead for fifteen years, and almost forgotten (except perhaps in the field of Opera). The bulk of his theories were rejected by the scientific community, except for one aspect: the relationship between the ability to recognize a frequency and the capacity to reproduce it vocally (the “first law” of Tomatis, or the “Tomatis effect”). Coppola seeks to test empirically the “Tomatis effect”, using as subjects two opera singers, and having as an experimental apparatus the “electronic ear”, built to a level of technology far superior to that which Tomatis could have had in the '50s.

The experimental research by Valerio Cori, Carla Canestrari and Ivana Bianchi starts from an interesting idea developed in recent years by the same Ivana Bianchi, especially in collaboration with Ugo Savardi: the fact that among the formal unification factors proposed by Gestalt theory could be understood also “opposition” or “contrast” (near-far, big-small, long-short, etc.). According to the authors, irony is not just a situation of opposites, but can be a situation of recognition of intermediate states between opposites, with relative intermediate levels of irony. The experimental research presented moves in a pure Gestalt perspective.

Now we come to a work that deals with the relationship between Gestalt psychology and art, in this case music. So Paolo Russo, also on the basis of a thorough review of the literature, analyzes how the laws of Gestalt apply in music, with particular attention to songs of a certain length and to polyphony. Referring also to the contributions of the great theoretician Leonard Meyer (who was not a Gestaltist, but drew a number of insights from Gestalt psychology), Russo, focusing on work of the late nineteenth century, in particular “concertatos”, states that the laws of Gestalt can be traced through the style and the syntax of the pieces.

The last group of contributions is specifically of clinical interest. There is the

theoretical paper by Norbert Andersch, a neuropsychiatrist who divides his time between England and Italy. His vision of psychopathology, in building a “neurosemiotics”, blends the Gestalt approach (especially that of Goldstein) with significant philosophical contributions, particularly from Cassirer, Whitehead and Piaget. Andersch, who analyzes schizophrenia, argues that the process of “Gestalt building” is crucial for mental stability: without, however, ignoring other forms of construction of the world. This analysis can be considered a sort of “genetic semiotics”.

Thomas Fuchs is a psychotherapist with a Gestalt theoretic orientation. In a critical analysis of the literature, which starts from Wertheimer, he focuses on the concept of pain as “urgency” (*Dringlichkeit*) in Duncker. The more intense is the pain experienced, the closer it is to the core of the phenomenal field. This opens up innovative perspectives for treatment, especially of chronic pain, beyond the often misleading research into organic causes.

Also of clinical interest is the work of Sigrid Wieltschnig, psychotherapist of Gestalt theoretic orientation in Vienna, which deals with the treatment of trauma. According to Wieltschnig, a leading idea must be tracked down to Wertheimer’s basic “formula” (1924): “There are wholes, the behavior of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole.” It emphasizes the importance of feeling connected with one’s own feelings in the present moment. In this regard, an approach in terms of movement therapy looks particularly promising.

A final clinical contribution is that of Hannes Ulrich, Stefan Siegel, Herbert Fitzek, and Laura F. Kuhle. These authors present a new method of art therapy: Art Coaching, for the treatment of gender dysphoria, namely the state of deep psychological dysphoria that occurs during the process of gender transition, in the phase in which the person is dissatisfied with his own gender but has not yet assumed the identity of the opposite sex. At the basis of this approach there are the theoretical principles of Gestalt theoretic psychotherapy.

In conclusion, the contributions to the Convention are focused around two fundamental themes: one historical/methodological, the other clinical. It is interesting to note that only one contribution is strictly experimental. This may or may not raise some concern: and whether it represents a trend, only time will tell.

One last, sad remark. The reader will find in this issue of the journal two obituaries: one, for Giuseppe Galli, by Gerhard Stemberger, and the other for Mario Zanforlin, written by Michele Sinico. Galli and Zanforlin were two close friends of this journal, of GTA, and of all of us. We will always remember Giuseppe’s shy, ironic smile and Mario’s broad and deep laugh; Giuseppe’s never trivial papers,

full of philosophical insights; Mario's fantastic solids created in a virtual space by rotating disks. We send our condolences to their wives, Anna Arfelli, she too a respected psychologist, and Nicolette Whitteridge, who spent her life teaching English to students of psychology. Ciao Giuseppe, ciao Mario!

Riccardo Luccio