

**Anxiety Within the Situation: Disturbances of Gestalt Construction**  
**by Jean-Marie Robine**  
**in Gestalt Therapy in Clinical Practice: From Psychopathology to the Aesthetics of**  
**Contact**  
(Gestalt Therapy Book Series) Istituto di Gestalt HCC Italy. Kindle Edition.

## Contents

1. Anxiety in Gestalt Therapy .....	2
1.1. Anxiety and Excitement .....	2
1.2 Anxiety and Support.....	2
1.3. Can We Speak of Contact “Interruptions”? .....	2
1.4. Anxiety in Gestalt Construction .....	3
1.4.1. Emergence of a Figure versus Confluence .....	3
1.4.2. Flections I .....	4
1.4.3. Excitement of One’s Own Desire versus Introjection.....	5
1.4.4. Flections II .....	6
1.4.5. Perception of the Environment versus Projection.....	7
1.4.6. Flections III .....	8
1.4.7. Going Towards versus Retroreflection .....	8
1.4.8. Flections IV .....	9
1.4.9. Letting Go versus Egotism.....	10
1.4.10. Flections V .....	11
Conclusion: Psychotherapy as an Emergency Situation.....	11
Comment by Myriam Muñoz Polit.....	13

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- Loc: 11,278 | If we see psychology as the study of human experience, then psychopathology is the study of the dysfunctions of that experience. If we regard human experience as essentially unique since it includes all the contact operations that link human beings with their world, then the study of the dysfunctions of experience will show us some of the ways in which experience may cease to be unique, presenting instead a number of flections
- Loc: 11,283 | It seems to me more appropriate than the term “contact interruptions”, or even “resistances” as
- Loc: 11,286 | A psychotherapeutic approach adopted for its focus on the concept of experience can be linked to a psychopathological description of the flections of this experience,
- Loc: 11,294 | [1. Anxiety in Gestalt Therapy](#)
- Loc: 11,297 | [1.1. Anxiety and Excitement](#)
- Loc: 11,300 | “excitement”
- Loc: 11,300 | is born with the emergence of each figure and tends to be attached to the “object” which is contacted, so much so that it would be pointless to locate it in either the organism or in the environment.
- Loc: 11,302 | Excitement is maintained, increases and then diminishes during the entire contact sequence. However, this excitement may be inhibited or blocked, for various reasons, resulting in anxiety.
- Loc: 11,306 | [1.2 Anxiety and Support](#)
- Loc: 11,309 | the perspective pioneered by Laura Perls (2001), which links anxiety to the absence of necessary support during the contact experience.
- Loc: 11,310 | if an interruption occurs
- Loc: 11,311 | in the context of inability to engage with the challenges
- Loc: 11,311 | or fear of moving on to the next,
- Loc: 11,312 | result is anxiety.
- Loc: 11,312 | prevents the subject from drawing the necessary supportive
- Loc: 11,312 | from within
- Loc: 11,312 | or from the environment.
- Loc: 11,317 | [1.3. Can We Speak of Contact “Interruptions”?](#)

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Loc: 11,319	the concepts of confluence, introjection, projection, retroflection and egotism have a controversial history within Gestalt therapy.
Loc: 11,323	In the second, theoretical part of the founding text – Gestalt Therapy (1951)
Loc: 11,323	phenomena were addressed in the last chapter, Loss of Ego-Functions.
Loc: 11,325	the authors show how these modalities of contact (introjection, projection etc.) may constitute a pathological experience when accompanied by a loss of ego-functioning.
Loc: 11,327	it is experience which may be inflected – or even considered pathological – when two factors operate concurrently:
Loc: 11,328	loss of ego-function and the presence of one of these modalities.
Loc: 11,329	use of the expression “contact interruptions”
Loc: 11,330	remember that contact has a specialised technical meaning within the theory of Gestalt therapy: it refers to figure formation.
Loc: 11,331	not contact itself that is interrupted but the forms it takes when influenced by one of these flections of experience.
Loc: 11,343	<b><u><a href="#">1.4. Anxiety in Gestalt Construction</a></u></b>
Loc: 11,345	<b><u><a href="#">1.4.1. Emergence of a Figure versus Confluence</a></u></b>
Loc: 11,347	fore-contact phase, the body and its primary and secondary physiological processes form the ground.
Loc: 11,348	Within the on-going situation,
Loc: 11,349	consciously or not, “something” emerges.
Loc: 11,349	“id of the situation”,
Loc: 11,351	concept of the “id” refers precisely to this pressure, and to the awareness of pressure,
Loc: 11,352	shorn of any speculation as to its possible origin.
Loc: 11,352	The id-function is a modality of the self,
Loc: 11,353	inseparable from awareness,

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- Loc: 11,353 | emerges from the figure and constitutes the “what-comes-next” of the situation.
- Loc: 11,354 | during this phase of the sequence the self is primarily a function of physiology and thus forms part of the organism,
- Loc: 11,355 | At other times,
- Loc: 11,355 | the self appears much more clearly as a function of the field, or more precisely as «the way the field includes the organism» (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951, II, 12, 1).
- Loc: 11,357 | it is the appetite, or the environmental stimulus which awakens it, which is the figure.
- Loc: 11,359 | **1.4.2. Flections I**
- Loc: 11,361 | The acknowledgment of an appetite or a desire,
- Loc: 11,363 | produce excitement.
- Loc: 11,363 | Hence they may lead to anxiety which prevents the figure emerging.
- Loc: 11,364 | This interruption of the sequence,
- Loc: 11,365 | is more a failure to start, takes place through confluence.
- Loc: 11,365 | Refusing to allow the figure to emerge is tantamount to maintaining, or seeking, confluence (Lapeyronnie and Robine, 1996).
- Loc: 11,367 | available modalities for maintaining confluence are similar to repression,
- Loc: 11,368 | chapter XIV (1951).
- Loc: 11,369 | One
- Loc: 11,370 | functions of maintaining this confluence relates to anxiety about individuation and differentiation:
- Loc: 11,370 | becoming aware of one’s desire means adopting the first person singular,
- Loc: 11,371 | Confluence,
- Loc: 11,372 | removes this risk.
- Loc: 11,375 | maintaining confluence makes it difficult to transform physiological into psychological experience,

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Loc: 11,376	thus it forces experience to stay at the physiological level of unawareness.
Loc: 11,376	repressed excitement then remains exclusively physical,
Loc: 11,377	sensation cannot become affect and nor can affect become feeling or emotion. The pathology which may result tends to see the body as an object,
Loc: 11,378	during this phase that excitement may come to a halt and anxiety may become fixed within the body,
Loc: 11,379	often described as psychosomatic conditions
Loc: 11,381	Less severe disturbances linked to repeated interruption of this phase
Loc: 11,381	manifested in various forms of immaturity – or regression
Loc: 11,382	absence of contact with the environment deprives the organism of novelty and hence interrupts growth.
Loc: 11,401	<b>1.4.3. Excitement of One's Own Desire versus Introjection</b>
Loc: 11,403	The emergence of a figure from the ground,
Loc: 11,404	initiates a stage of the contact sequence where there is a dynamic relationship between figure and ground.
Loc: 11,406	the particular feature of the excitement of this stage is that it brings the organism out of a state of
Loc: 11,407	rest and silence
Loc: 11,407	into an awakening of desire.
Loc: 11,410	This nascent growing appetite needs an "object".
Loc: 11,411	that is, some feature of the world to be contacted, to take up in order to meet, appropriate, and assimilate.
Loc: 11,414	Perls (1942) used the term introjection to refer solely to a "pathological" process, the healthy equivalent being "assimilation".
Loc: 11,414	Today
Loc: 11,415	a tendency to apply the term introjection to the entire phenomenon,
Loc: 11,415	grasping the world around us and appropriating it,

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Loc: 11,416	may lead either to assimilation
Loc: 11,416	or construction of an introject
Loc: 11,416	If the
Loc: 11,417	object becomes fixated in the form of a “foreign body”, we term this an introject.
Loc: 11,423	<b>1.4.4. Flections II</b>
Loc: 11,424	«coercion is incompatible with excitement»,
Loc: 11,425	any aspect of the environment begins to exercise coercion,
Loc: 11,426	the excitement linked to the upsurge of desire becomes immobilised.
Loc: 11,426	heightening of this excitement produces anxiety.
Loc: 11,426	desire itself cannot be recognised,
Loc: 11,427	Introjection occurs when «the self [...] displaces its own potential desire or appetite with someone else’s» (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951, II, XV, 5),
Loc: 11,428	a substitute for creating its own appetite, desire, or meaning.
Loc: 11,428	Affect is then turned back before it can be recognised and thereby felt.
Loc: 11,429	Introjection thus formed can never become assimilation.
Loc: 11,434	one most frequently encountered
Loc: 11,435	is found in patients who present narcissistic disturbances of experience.
Loc: 11,435	constraint
Loc: 11,435	in their early years to substitute the significant parent’s desire for their own desire in order to survive emotionally forces them into the “habit” of ignoring their own desire,
Loc: 11,437	sometimes confusing it with an absence of desire,
Loc: 11,437	constantly seeking introjection: the patient’s identity is replaced by introjects,
Loc: 11,444	aware that he had been attempting to replace his parents with his friends,

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- Loc: 11,445 | his friends by me,
- Loc: 11,445 | who would be able to show him how he should feel, think and act in any situation.
- Loc: 11,446 | But what do I feel? Nothing!
- Loc: 11,447 | All I do is act the way people expect me to in the situation”.
- Loc: 11,466 | **1.4.5. Perception of the Environment versus Projection**
- Loc: 11,468 | If the excitement of desire has not been interrupted
- Loc: 11,469 | desire can once again fade into the background and excite the ground as a resource for construction of the current Gestalt.
- Loc: 11,471 | at this point in the sequence, figure formation requires an investment of energy from both poles of the field, the organism and the environment.
- Loc: 11,472 | desire which formed the figure in the previous phase gives
- Loc: 11,472 | way to the object, or a series of possible objects.
- Loc: 11,472 | a particularly sensitive – and anxiety-creating – moment as the figure migrates from one pole of the field (the organism) to the other (the environment),
- Loc: 11,475 | “Moving out” immediately recalls the Latin equivalent: “ex-movere”, from which “emotion” is derived.
- Loc: 11,475 | This moment is
- Loc: 11,475 | the phase when emotion is most crucial.
- Loc: 11,476 | Gestalt therapy sees emotion as a kind of impact between the state of the organism and the state of the environment:
- Loc: 11,478 | field» (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951, II, XII, 6).
- Loc: 11,479 | for emotion to exist, it is necessary to «accept the excitement and face up to the environment», meaning «relating appetite or other drive with a vaguely conceived object» (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951, II, XII, 5).
- Loc: 11,481 | confronting and adapting to the environment
- Loc: 11,482 | is a process of trial and error involving
- Loc: 11,482 | adaptations which commonly use projection as a tool for orientation

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Loc: 11,484	intuition, premonition, or simply the capacity to apply to current experience knowledge derived from previous experiences is part of projection in its broadest sense.
Loc: 11,487	<b>1.4.6. Flections III</b>
Loc: 11,493	In projection as defined in Gestalt therapy,
Loc: 11,493	is more a question of an unwitting refusal (denial, impossibility...) to own one's own affect, emotion, and feelings and their accompanying representations.
Loc: 11,495	the subject constructs a screen in relation to the field.
Loc: 11,496	features of the environment fail to register because the environment is reduced to virtual images created by the subject him/herself.
Loc: 11,499	Any form of denial will entail projection,
Loc: 11,500	contributes to the elaboration of compulsive rituals and reaction formations,
Loc: 11,501	neurotic guilt,
Loc: 11,501	jealousy,
Loc: 11,501	and others.
Loc: 11,512	<b>1.4.7. Going Towards versus Retroflexion</b>
Loc: 11,514	able to perceive and create the environment, excitement may then truly engage with the situation: go towards and contact fully.
Loc: 11,515	Identifications and alienations progressively restrict the field of possibilities,
Loc: 11,515	this going-towards may suscite anxiety or dread,
Loc: 11,516	this function «originally directed towards the world by the individual, changes direction and turns back on its originator» (Perls, 1942).
Loc: 11,517	Going-towards, ad-gredere in Latin, corresponds to the Gestalt conception of aggression
Loc: 11,518	a beneficial, self-expressive, and creative human power to make something or to make something happen,
Loc: 11,519	willing to give oneself back to the world as well as to receive



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Loc: 11,519	(Miller, 1994).
Loc: 11,521	retroflexion is the contacting modality which makes it possible to avoid the anxiety of aggression.
Loc: 11,522	is then turned back onto «the only available harmless objects in the field, his own body and personality» (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951, II, XV, 7).
Loc: 11,523	retroflexion enables engagement to be slowed down, making it possible to readjust the emotion, correct the ground and hence reconsider the emotion.
Loc: 11,524	is called self-control, and is linked to the exercise of will.
Loc: 11,526	appropriate to slow down or not engage in aggressive activity, considering the context
Loc: 11,526	A retroflexion may then rightly be considered a creative adjustment.
Loc: 11,528	Thinking (re-flecting) is a type of retroflexion, talking to yourself.
Loc: 11,530	Thinking as a way of preparing to relate is not the same as thinking as a way of avoiding action.
Loc: 11,533	<b>1.4.8. Flections IV</b>
Loc: 11,534	retroflexion can intervene
Loc: 11,535	[the] current Gestalt with or without the intervention of the ego function,
Loc: 11,535	with or without awareness,
Loc: 11,535	this is what makes the difference.
Loc: 11,536	When
Loc: 11,536	aggression,
Loc: 11,536	cannot be expressed
Loc: 11,536	may turn into hostility
Loc: 11,537	fear of destroying produces anxiety,
Loc: 11,537	destructiveness will then turn towards
Loc: 11,537	available objects:
Loc: 11,537	own body and personality.

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Loc: 11,538	retroflexion will be manifested as self-destructive behaviour,
Loc: 11,538	self-harming
Loc: 11,538	obsessions
Loc: 11,539	psychosomatic illnesses,
Loc: 11,539	suicide
Loc: 11,539	masochism,
Loc: 11,539	compulsion to fail
Loc: 11,539	remorse,
Loc: 11,539	resignation
Loc: 11,539	self-mastery.
Loc: 11,540	Perls made a clear distinction between repression and retroflexion:
Loc: 11,541	of the latter «little material is lost
Loc: 11,541	only a reorientation
Loc: 11,541	the conflicts which induced the retroflexion are near the surface» (Perls, 1942, III, 8).
Loc: 11,556	<b>1.4.9. Letting Go versus Egotism</b>
Loc: 11,557	The concept of egotism
Loc: 11,558	is ignored in most theoretical and clinical texts,
Loc: 11,560	In order to attain final contact, spontaneity must be able to supersede the deliberateness which often dominates
Loc: 11,561	through loosening control, letting-go, daring to finish the action undertaken, opening the barriers to the encounter with the object contacted,
Loc: 11,562	allowing the I-Thou to become briefly a We.
Loc: 11,563	The problem with this control,
Loc: 11,563	is that it is not itself under control.
Loc: 11,564	excess of ego invested in this phase of the self,
Loc: 11,564	the ego finds it impossible to choose not to exercise control.

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Loc: 11,565	excess of ego goes hand in hand with a loss of ego function.
Loc: 11,566	see egotism as a specific form of retroflexion inasmuch as
Loc: 11,567	«Any act of deliberate self-control during a difficult engagement is retroflexion» (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951 II, XV, 7).
Loc: 11,571	Egotism manifests itself through diffidence, scepticism or slowness.
Loc: 11,573	<b>1.4.10. Flections V</b>
Loc: 11,575	in certain situations, the approach of final contact produces so much anxiety that egotism is used as a final brake to avoid it.
Loc: 11,576	often occurs towards the end of therapy, when “introspection” has become second nature
Loc: 11,576	often found,
Loc: 11,577	in individuals presenting with narcissistic disorders of experience.
Loc: 11,577	anxious when faced with letting go, anxious about loss of control, anxious about opening up to the other, anxious about being swallowed up by the We of the encounter, or anxious about being subsequently abandoned, they cut themselves off from the environment and reduce it to a stock of knowledge they can use to increase their power and control.
Loc: 11,581	Isadore From emphasized that using any form of “we”, even at the purely verbal level may arouse anxiety in personalities who present with serious disturbances of their narcissistic experience.
Loc: 11,590	<b><u>Conclusion: Psychotherapy as an Emergency Situation</u></b>
Loc: 11,592	When the organism finds itself in a new situation of disequilibrium, danger, threat, survival,
Loc: 11,592	a situation
Loc: 11,592	the holistic approach describe
Loc: 11,593	as an emergency,
Loc: 11,593	formulates a global adaptive response:
Loc: 11,596	through repeated failures to re-establish equilibrium (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951, II, III, 9),
Loc: 11,598	the adaptive Gestalt may become chronic at a low-key level.

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Loc: 11,598	tension
Loc: 11,598	danger and frustration,
Loc: 11,598	mutually reinforce
Loc: 11,599	to the point of neurosis.
Loc: 11,599	«a chronic low-grade emergency», is one definition of neurosis.
Loc: 11,601	In this situation, the contact boundary
Loc: 11,601	simplify
Loc: 11,601	to the two emergency functions
Loc: 11,602	deliberate blotting-out
Loc: 11,602	non-deliberate hyperactivity. Note:(Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951, II, III, 9),
Loc: 11,608	This disturbance
Loc: 11,609	corresponds to
Loc: 11,609	a disturbance of
Loc: 11,609	(perception and proprioception), Note:orientation
Loc: 11,609	which brings
Loc: 11,609	a disturbance
Loc: 11,610	(psychomotor activity). Note:manipulation
Loc: 11,611	the neurotic state is the response to a non-existent chronic low-grade emergency,
Loc: 11,612	the aim is to concentrate on
Loc: 11,612	existing high-grade emergency
Loc: 11,612	which the patient can actually cope and
Loc: 11,613	grow» 1951, II, IV, 12).
Loc: 11,613	
Loc: 11,614	the full meaning of the concept of experiment

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- Loc: 11,615 | in using the actual emergency, or even creating a high-intensity experimental emergency in situ.
- Loc: 11,617 | the point is for the patient to feel the behaviour in its very emergency use and at the same time to feel that he is safe because he can cope with the situation» (ibidem).
- Loc: 11,619 | Gestalt therapy,
- Loc: 11,620 | cannot dissociate the tools
- Loc: 11,620 | in diagnosis from
- Loc: 11,620 | intervention,
- Loc: 11,624 | [Comment by Myriam Muñoz Polit](#)
- Loc: 11,627 | description of what is dysfunctional instead of
- Loc: 11,628 | pathological
- Loc: 11,628 | more appropriate
- Loc: 11,628 | of Gestalt Therapy.
- Loc: 11,628 | should definitively abandon the use of the concept of “psychopathological”.
- Loc: 11,629 | avoid any notion that takes us
- Loc: 11,629 | to the idea
- Loc: 11,629 | the person with inflections,
- Loc: 11,630 | is “sick”.
- Loc: 11,630 | the Gestalt focus is
- Loc: 11,630 | an educational model
- Loc: 11,630 | not
- Loc: 11,630 | a medical model.
- Loc: 11,631 | medical model has set its sights on curing,
- Loc: 11,632 | educational model emphasizes
- Loc: 11,633 | development of potentialities,

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Loc: 11,640	the vision of Gestalt Therapy: human beings are constructive by nature and require support from their environment for their development.
Loc: 11,645	descriptions of the sensations that may be involved in the process of contact and figure/ground formation.
Loc: 11,646	their equivalent, in terms of feelings, would be anxiety and enthusiasm.
Loc: 11,649	human beings share from birth basic emotions that take the form of feelings
Loc: 11,650	these feelings are fear, affection, sadness, anger, and happiness,
Loc: 11,651	words, there are five "families"
Loc: 11,651	from which all emotional experiences are born,
Loc: 11,654	anxiety, which is a sensation, and anguish, its corresponding feeling, belong to the family of fear, where the spontaneous reaction is to seek protection and withdraw from any threats.
Loc: 11,655	excitement, which is a sensation, and enthusiasm, its corresponding feeling, stem from the combination of two families, fear and happiness, where the spontaneous reaction is ambivalent, with threat coexisting alongside an attraction to novelty.

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