...Social peace can never be permanently achieved so long as individuals engage in civil war with themselves. I maintain that a co-operative world can never be fashioned by men and women who are corroded by the acids of inner hate, and I believe that our much-heralded “society of security” will remain a Utopian vision so long as the individuals composing that society are desperately insecure, not only economically but emotionally and spiritually [Liebman, 1946, pxi].

I recently attended the Ninth European Conference of Gestalt Therapy. The theme was Exploring Human Conflict. The choice of this theme is not surprising since we seem more and more to have to deal with conflict wherever we look. In response, a major portion of this journal issue is devoted to an in-depth exploration of this topic. I will first introduce it by describing how Gestalt theory can help us conceptualize and work with this important issue. We will feature two articles with commentaries and a Back Pages essay that all focus on this subject. The first is Philip Lichtenberg’s “Enriched Awareness and Fuller Citizenship.” Lichtenberg more than any other contemporary Gestalt theorist has devoted his theoretical writings to exploring issues of oppression. In this passionate essay, he focuses on deconstructing the concept of projection. But his article contains much more. It is a plea for increased awareness, for a recapturing and embracing of our sense of vulnerability, for being open to engaging in social discourse, and for letting go of our delusional sense of safety: All are core requirements for living in our uncertain world.

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Our second article, “Living in the 21st Century: A Gestalt Therapist’s Search for a New Paradigm” by Ken Evans, details his view on how to expand Gestalt concepts to deal with “seemingly uncontrollable, violent sectarian/tribal conflict.” Inspired by a trip to Israel where he participated in a dialogue with both Israelis and Palestinians, he returned with a set of new thoughts designed to expand basic Gestalt concepts into a new paradigm of community. Lichtenberg’s article is followed by a commentary by Ben Alexander. In addition, we asked both Lichtenberg and Evans to comment on each other’s essays. The commentaries and the authors’ responses to them help to highlight aspects of the original papers and broaden the dialogue.

The third contribution on this topic is Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb’s essay, “Ego, Hunger and Aggression: Do We Bite in the Same Way As in the 50s?” Spagnuolo Lobb traces the history of aggression in Gestalt therapy beginning with Perls’s construct of dental aggression. She then describes the role of aggression in a number of contexts, including the present, in our changing world, tracing our movement from a “narcissistic” to a “technological” and now “liquid” society. It is hoped that after reading these articles you will appreciate not only how much Gestalt theory has to contribute to the conceptualization of conflicts, but also how much we have to offer in managing and resolving them.

Our current issue also contains two other articles worthy of your time. First is “Gestalt Therapy and the Concretization of Nietzsche’s Metaphor” by Edward W. L. Smith. As Lobb (in this issue) points out, the process of eating and, more specifically, dental aggression was a cornerstone of Perls’s original theory of development. It also forms the base for healthy aggression. But according to Smith, this did not originate with Perls. Smith does a masterful job of tracing the origins of this concept to Nietzsche who first discussed the downside of “swallowing whole” and “swallowing one’s words,” and how that results in a form of unhealthy confluence. Last, he gives a clear description of the role that the concept of introjection has as a source of psychopathology.

Recently much attention has been paid to the concept of autism throughout the world. As Lisa Audet and Norman Shub write in “Contact and the Phenomena of Autism,” this neurological disorder which diminishes a child’s ability to relate is well suited to the Gestalt approach which focuses on how human beings connect with each other. Utilizing Gestalt concepts such as contact, the here and now, and the importance of the therapeutic relationship as a healing tool, these authors make a convincing case for Gestalt therapy as a viable approach for conceptualizing and treating this disorder.

In addition to Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb’s essay, “Ego, Hunger and Aggression: Do We Bite in the Same Way As in the 50s?” already referred to in this editorial, Back Pages features Christine Stevenson’s review of Window Frames: Learning the Art of Gestalt Play Therapy the Oaklander Way by Peter Mortola. Knowledge of Oaklander’s pioneering approach is essential to any Gestalt therapist who works with children and, as Stevenson points out, this book accurately portrays her work.
its dedicated Editor and guiding light for fifteen years. Malcolm’s advice and counsel were important in the founding of Gestalt Review and he continues to be a valuable member of our Editorial Board. To Malcolm I want to share my appreciation for the consistently high quality of the BGJ. To Christine, whom I have come to know over the last few years, I want to welcome you as the new Editor. I wish you and the BGJ continued success.

I would also like to use this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the birth of a new Gestalt journal: Studies in Gestalt Therapy: Dialogical Bridges. It is co-edited by three senior Gestaltists, Dan Bloom, Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb, and Frank M. Staemmler. All of us at Gestalt Review wish you well.

R E F E R E N C E