

REVIEW

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Integrative Gestalt Practice

In a mix of gestalt therapy and Wilber's quadrant model a new intervention practice emerges. How and with what purpose is demonstrated in a new book.

The two psychologists Jan Tønnesvang, professor of integrative social and personality psychology at Aarhus University, and Mikael Sonne, an experienced psychotherapist and supervisor, have combined their competences to develop an intervention practice which they present in their book on “integrative gestalt practice”.

This is a new and different practice, in the sense that although it builds on theories and practices from familiar sources, among them gestalt therapy and Ken Wilber's quadrant model, in its combination and critique of these approaches and of classic and more recent psychological theory, integrative gestalt practice emerges as a qualitatively new approach. It has already been validated through pilot projects and practical applications.

Gestalt therapy, which is one of the two key approaches, rests on a foundation of phenomenology, existentialism, field theory and gestalt psychology. It is a hallmark of applied gestalt therapy that the therapeutic work is carried out by a therapist with a close personal presence, and that there is an emphasis on contact, process, attention and relationship. The book offers a thorough and clear review of these fundamental principles yet distances itself from the more orthodox version of the existentialist approach in gestalt therapy. In addition, it describes the emphasis on process and flow in applied gestalt therapy.

The other key element in integrative gestalt practice is Ken Wilber's quadrant model. This model, so to speak, embraces all the aspects of existence and the related scientific conceptual models. In its four fields, the quadrant model thus contains a singular perspective (I) and a plural perspective (we) suspended between interior and exterior. – Within these quadrants there are multiple layers (an endless number of horizontal layers of phenomena, descriptions and interpretations) in constant mutual interaction and varying between figure and ground.

Wilber's model is normally seen as a way of “conceptualizing” the world. As such it is superbly suited to clarifying complex issues. Gestalt therapy is a dynamic practice form that addresses what is, here and now, between “I” and “thou”. It seems meaningful to seek to combine Ken Wilber with gestalt therapy. They enrich each other, and in examples and exercises the authors clearly illustrate the usefulness of integrative gestalt practice.

Familiar building blocks, new pattern

The book contains sections with a considerable emphasis on theory, which makes for challenging reading that requires the reader's full concentration. It is not a book for the novice. At the same time, the text is often characterized by concise and inspiring clarity and an impressive ability to integrate rather diverse yet relevant theoretical approaches. The text clearly reflects the authors' experience with (gestalt) therapy practice framed by the quadrant model and its attempt to clarify and conceptualize the field. This is a quality that really engages the reader.

The project of developing "an integrative gestalt practice based on a systematic field concept and a holistic view of human psychology that includes the most fundamental principles of the gestalt approach" (to quote the text on the back of the book) is interesting, and Jan Tønnesvang and Mikael Sonne are well on their way to shaping a new practice approach.

Continued development of practice description and training and the education of additional practitioners will probably make the method more accessible to practitioners with a less academic background.

It is a strong and bold move to start the development of integrative gestalt practice from scratch, as old building blocks are recombined to form a new pattern. The subject field of practice has been broadened, as essentially the same non-pathologizing/non-reifying practice is applied to individuals, groups/families and organizations.

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Book data: Mikael Sonne and Jan Tønnesvang: *Integrativ gestaltpraksis – kompleksitet og helhed i arbejdet med mennesker*. Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2013. 240 pages. DKK 300.