

Giuseppe Galli on his 80th Birthday - A Gestaltist Between Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics



Giuseppe Galli was born in Ravenna in 1933. In 1957 he graduated in Medicine in Bologna. Here he carried out his psychological education under the guidance of Professor Renzo Canestrari and in cooperation with the psychologists of the Gestalt school, particularly Wolfgang Metzger (University of Münster) and Edwin Rausch (University of Frankfurt am Main). In 1961 he became General Psychology assistant at the Faculty of Medicine in Bologna. In 1964 he was appointed to the General Psychology Chair. Since 1966 he has taught this same subject at the University of Macerata (Academic course in Philosophy), where he became Full Professor in 1982. From 1982 to 1990 he held the function of pro-rector. In 1987 he collaborated on founding the Department of Philosophy and Human Sciences as a union of the two pre-existent Institutes of Philosophy and Pedagogy-Psychology. In 2000 he founded the Interuniversity Centre of Studies „Medicine and Human Sciences “Augusto Murri”” From 2003 to 2006 he was the Director of the Department of Education Sciences and the coordinator of the PhD Course in Education Sciences. Since September 2009 he has been Professor Emeritus.

I have had the luck and the pleasure to know Giuseppe Galli for about forty years, at the beginning as a student, then as a pupil, and finally as a colleague and friend. Now, I am delineating the different themes of his research activity, underlining its originality and its indissoluble tie with Gestalt theory. In order not to take long and because of the international impact of this, for each theme I quote just the German and English publications and not the numerous Italian ones.

Research on Perception of Expressivity and Centring

In the sixties, at first at the University of Bologna and then at the University of Macerata, Galli applied the phenomenological-experimental Gestalt method to the study of the expressive and structural qualities in the perception of the human face. He adopts the parameters of the centring (Zentrierung), proposed by Wertheimer, Metzger and Rausch, that is to say the hierarchical organization inside the figures (primary and secondary, necessary and inessential, supporting and supported parts; main directions and anchorage).

Research on the Psychology of the Phenomenal Self

From the end of the sixties, Galli devoted himself to the study of the phenomenal self. At the beginning he employed laboratory research in which subjects were invited to observe the variously deformed shadows of their outline and describe their feelings verbally. This new theme of research encouraged the passage from the study of “phenomenal objectivity” (what you have in front of you with its qualities) to that of “phenomenal subjectivity” (the Self with its qualities). It also contributed to filling the gap inherited by the Gestalt founding fathers, interested above all in the first theme.

Studying the Phenomenal Self, Galli realized the limits of the laboratory situations, where the relationship between the researcher and the subject is managed by the researcher’s interests and the subject cooperation is therefore limited. This is different from what happens in clinical situations, where the relationship between the psychologist and the subject is linked to the same therapeutic purpose.

Meanwhile Galli also realized the essential role played by language in this research. It becomes a primary phenomenal datum, which is certainly preliminary to, or at least concomitant with, the study of the individual’s phenomenal reality to which it refers. These methodological problems drove Galli to the transition from the *phenomenological-experimental* approach to the *linguistic-hermeneutical* approach. As a matter of fact he felt the necessity to expand on both the art of dialogue, with the aid of clinical psychology, and the problem of the interpretation of texts, with the aid of linguistics and hermeneutics.

The preparation for the clinical dialogue took place thanks to the supervision of the psychoanalysts Giampaolo Lai and Pierrette Lavanchy. Fundamental for the linguistics was the collaboration with J. S. Petöfi, who was Professor of Semantics at the University of Bielefeld, and then, from the eighties, Professor of Philosophy of Language at the University of Macerata. In his “Theory of the Text Structure and the World Structure”, Galli traces the globalistic approach of Gestalt psychology. The elaboration of the hermeneutical approach took place thanks to collaboration with some philosopher colleagues, in particular Giovanni Ferretti (you can see in the bibliography the publications from [1] to [7]).

I met Galli during this phase of transition in the first years of the 70s: as a student of Philosophy, I attended his lessons on General Psychology. I was impressed by his way of teaching and staying on talking with his students: he was calm, deliberate, friendly, well disposed to dialogue and sympathetic with points of view different from his own. I saw a “benevolent” father, accepting and encouraging. His teaching was about some principles of Gestalt theory’s founding fathers, later systematized by Metzger in *Gesetze des Sehens* (1953) and in *Psychologie* (1954). Galli read and studied these principles directly in German and he has held to them until now: the phenomenal reality as a continuum of Encountered (*das Angetroffene*) and Represented (*das Vergegenwärtigte*), distinct from the transphenomenal reality and considered as the main study object of Psychology, defined as the science of the immediate phenomenal datum, that is to say of experience (*Erlebnis*), the internal world; the difference between naïve and critical realism; the phenomenal primacy of Gestalt, of its global qualities; the role or the functions of the parts in the whole; the reciprocal dependence between the whole and its parts; transposition; centring; phenomenology as a research method.

Galli let me be involved in his research as a collaborator-apprentice. This research was financed by the CNR (Council of National Research) and it was about the structure of the Phenomenal Self. It was not absolutely accidental that my degree thesis, discussed in February 1974, had him as supervisor and that it was about the relations between *self-concept*, a private construct, and *self-reports*, the linguistic expressions people use to describe themselves. Nor was it by chance that I spent the semester immediately after my degree studying Petöfi’s text theory at the University of Bielefeld.

Since then, the study of the relations between language and phenomenal reality has been the dominant theme of my research and Galli has been my main and constant critical point of reference. He always respects diversity, particularly in the moments in which there are beneficial (for both of us) divergences of views, theoretical or methodological. Despite our affinity of interests and approaches, we wrote just one paper together, at the end of the research financed by the CNR. But this is characteristic of Galli as a researcher and, probably, as a person, rather than something particular to my relationship with him. In fact, except for a pair of articles written in collaboration when he was in Bologna, in all his other numerous publications Galli appears as the “solitary” one author. Perhaps he wanted to protect from external contamination the interior elaboration and the uniqueness, the singularity of his thought, his internal dialogue with Metzger, Wertheimer, Freud, Bachtin and other important figures, his essential, brief, concise way of writing.

The Conferences on Interpretation

In 1979, beginning from his interest in the interpretation of therapeutic dialogues, Galli guessed that the hermeneutical approach could be more productive if it

were to compare different perspectives on the same text. Therefore he suggested comparing the methodological aspects of the interpretative processes everyone puts into effect in the personal study field with some academics of other disciplines (biblists, jurists, philosophers, linguists, historians, literates, psychologists and psychotherapists).

In this way the first Conference on Interpretation was born and it was followed, annually, by another eighteen meetings, all characterised by this multidisciplinary. If considered altogether, the themes which were treated can be divided into a first and a second series. The first is formed by methodological themes about the following question: *how can you understand a text?* Some of the variables which were analyzed are the context, the structure, the interpreter's values, the symbol, the dialogue. In the second series the interest moves from the architecture of the text and the methodological aspects of the interpretative process to one of its functions, that is to say to let the reader *identify himself in the text*, following the meaning P. Ricoeur gives to this expression (the Proceedings of the Conferences are edited by Galli and published in the Monographs of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Macerata. About the dynamic processes of the multidisciplinary research work, you can see the publications [8] and [9] in the bibliography).

Psychology of the Social Virtues

In the last Conference on Interpretation, Galli suggested focusing on some essential interpersonal relations, such as forgiveness, gratitude, astonishment, promise, sincerity, self-sacrifice, trust. Each theme was treated in a multidisciplinary way according to the different researchers' typical perspectives.

At the end of this series of Conferences, Galli studied the same themes following the phenomenological-hermeneutical approach. He proposed a kind of analysis performed not only by psychologists, but also on texts of a different origin: literary, philosophical, religious texts etc. Galli thinks that the most appropriate definition for these behaviours is "social virtues": for each of them favouring and opposing factors are analyzed (you can see the publications from [10] to [13] in the bibliography).

Intersemiotic Transposition: The Method of the Scenic Analysis

In recent years Galli has again taken up the theme of the relationship between seeing and interpreting, in particular in the area of the problem of transposition from a system of verbal signs to an iconic one. Therefore he elaborated the method of the scenic analysis, applying also in this case the Gestalt structural approach.

The scenic analysis is a procedure of structural survey which gives the same importance both to the aspects of the "whole" and of its component "parts".

It uses concepts of dramaturgic type such as “scene”, “role”, “scenographic environment”, “change of the scene”, “change of the role” etc. Such a type of analysis follows in particular Wertheimer’s teaching, who demonstrated the close connection between the qualities of the Whole and the qualities or “roles” of the parts in the survey of the structures (you can see the publications from [14] to [15] in the bibliography).

Gestalt Psychology as a Methodological Doctrine

Galli’s interest in the epistemological aspects of Gestalt psychology initially came from the comparison between Gestalt theory and psychoanalysis. The first can be defined as the *school of the respect* towards the experiences as they appear to the awareness, the consciousness. The second, instead, can be defined as the *school of the suspicion* towards the patient’s (transferal) words and behaviour. Subsequently Galli expanded on the methodological aspects of Gestalt Theory with reference to the developments of the different applications the theory allows one to carry out. In his book *Gestaltpsychologie und Person*, Galli elucidates the fecundity of Gestalt theory in the study of the different aspects of a person: the person and his Self, the person in relationships, the person in action (you can see the publications from [16] to [25] in the bibliography).

Activity of the Studies Centre Medicine And Human Sciences “Augusto Murri”

As anticipated at the beginning of this Laudatio, in 2000 Galli founded the Centre of Studies <<Medicine and Human Sciences “Augusto Murri”>> thanks to a cooperation among the Universities of Macerata and Bologna and the University Institution of Fermo. The aim of the Centre is to promote research from an interdisciplinary perspective on the relationship between medicine and human sciences, with particular attention to the historical, logic-epistemological, anthropological and ethical, psychological and educational aspects. The Centre organized four meetings of multidisciplinary research, in which Medicine and Human Sciences academics participated. They were about the relationship between interpretation on the one hand, and on the other hand diagnosis, individuality, care, birth (the Proceedings of these meetings are edited by Giuseppe Galli and published in the series of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Macerata. They are distributed by the Editorial and Polygraphic International Institutes of Pisa-Rome. Moreover, you can see the publications [26] and [27] in the bibliography).

His support of the theoretical principles of Gestalt Psychology, the qualitative analysis of personal experience as a method of research and the opening of different disciplinary fields make Galli an authentic and original Gestaltist. With the passing of time, he appears more interested in theoretical-methodological reflection than in empirical research. Moreover he appears fascinated both by

psychoanalysis and by hermeneutical philosophy, which he manages to skillfully integrate into Gestalt theory. There, in my opinion, lies his main originality.

Andrzej Zuczkowski

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