

Introduction

When we published the book *Sexuality and Aggression* in 2015, we began to fill a gap that had become apparent over the years in the development of Gestalt therapy after Perls. The topic of sexuality had become increasingly marginal and with it the possibility of developing a sexology, namely a theoretical and clinical view of sexual dysfunctions and paraphilias.

In part, this gap can be explained by what Gestalt therapy's approach to human suffering has been for years. For Gestalt, the symptom always represents a solution, an attempt to restore an altered balance in the organism/environment relationship. Gestalt therapy does not have a negative view of the symptom. It recognises the suffering that often accompanies the symptom and the importance of relieving it, but it also believes that, in order for improvement and well-being to be possible and long-lasting, it is necessary to bring out the functionality of the symptom, i.e. what the person needs to change in the relationship with the environment that surrounds him or her, and how the symptom contains indicators of the direction of this change.

Due to this, for many years Gestalt therapy did not develop interventions targeted at individual pathologies, but it rather brought them back into a holistic view in which the symptom was only a sign of a more general malaise that the person was experiencing.

While continuing to maintain this holistic view, the various Gestalt schools have, over the past twenty years, developed in-depth theories on specific sufferings and pathologies, in the belief that developing a more in-depth and detailed theory and practice of the various sufferings does not necessarily mean compartmentalising the human being and creating specialists who lose the overview, but rather fostering a greater understanding of the complexity of the human being and the prices he/she pays in terms of suffering for his/her exceptional capacity to adapt to life.

This handbook of sexology is part of this trend to recognise the incredible complexity that human beings have to deal with on a daily basis.

From the sociological and the anthropological points of view to the political and the legal, from the change and the evolution to the suffering and the clinic.

In the first part of the book we tried to point out that the sexual revolution is far from being complete, and that all the resistance and violence that still oppose gender equality, as well as the arrogance of patriarchal and religiously inspired morals, show that the control of sexuality and its forms of expression is still a powerful instrument of social control and oppression. We have tried to clarify how overcoming patriarchy is an essential step in order to enjoy and benefit from the support that sexuality can provide for the development of human societies.

In the second part we have made the effort to deepen the already rich Gestalt therapy's view of the self. The concept of the sexual-self emphasises the initiation and unification drive that sexuality provides to the organism/environment field, or perhaps, in this case, the individual/world, because human sexuality has developed characteristics of a design and creativity that are probably unknown to the rest of living organisms. We would like to highlight that the sexual-self is not 'another self', but only an initial step in the formation of the self that takes support from the drive towards the union of sexuality in order to overcome the fears and dangers of feeling 'part of'. We are talking about that 'participation' which, just as Gaber sang, frees human beings in making them recognise that they are indissolubly linked.

We have devoted ample space to the major changes that are taking place in the development of gender identity and sexual orientations because we believe that they speak not only of social control and oppression, as written above, but also of the recognition of the suffering that has important repercussions on the clinic.

The third part takes up the fundamental theme of contact in the clinical practice and the different forms of aggression, which have already been dealt with in a previous book, and which are here not only deepened, expanded upon, but also given greater consideration in the aetiology of sexual suffering.

Finally, sexual dysfunctions and paraphilias. The effort has been to give equal importance to the suffering and the desire to find a solution to phenomena that can become seriously disabling for the person and, at the same time, not to lose the transformative and evolutionary message that these phenomena which speak of 'other

sexuality' and other ways of experiencing sexuality carry with them.

It is an imperfect manual for many reasons. Firstly, because Gestalt therapy, if not psychotherapy in general, is still lagging behind and has few tools when it comes to such a complex topic as sexuality and its sufferings. As with any novelty, thought needs time and a community where comparisons and criticism can contribute to its growth. With regard to what we have written in these pages, we have already moved on in some respects, and that is the beauty of life.

Finally, after lengthy discussions among us co-authors as to whether we should wait to publish this book in order to systematise it in a more complete way or not, we have decided that it will come out now and in this form. Imperfect, but very much alive.

We hope that it will be a stimulus that will help readers to broaden their horizons and pursue their own reflections. With immense pleasure we will read those who are willing to share them with us.