

## Reviews

**Ulrich Clement (2010), *Terapia sessuale sistemica [Systemic sex therapy]*, Milano: Cortina Editore (Original Edition: *Systemische Sexualtherapie*, Klett-Cotta, 2004).**

The book by Clement Ulrich, Professor of Medical Psychology and Director of the Institute für Sexualtherapie, University of Heilderberg, takes a clear distance from what has been the more traditional clinical approach to sexology. This is in honor of Master and Johnson, but there is a clear difference in the clinical approach to what may be seen as a very sensitive issue in recent times: the fall of the desire that is not due to medical or biological causes but to relationship problems. As Clement writes, until 1970 there was nothing but improvisation and amateurism in the field of sexology.

With the doctor Masters and the psychologist Johnson there came the first empirical basis of their sex therapy. Besides reexamining prejudices and stereotypes dictated by social and cultural disinformation and deception, the study results led to the description of two historical milestones in sexual science: the human sexual response cycle (HSRC) and the clitoral orgasm. But what Clement emphasizes is the purely functionalist setting considered by the two authors, where the king orgasm and queen erection dominate the arena with the normative idea of a functionally correct sexual relationship.

This position prevents us from making progress in the treatment of disorders of sexual desire. Just because we are in a post-permissive era, today there are different problems faced by couples. In this sense, the sexual function of the two partners does not becomes central, but rather the sexual development of her femininity and his masculinity. In fact, they are people with their own sexuality, in a process that is oriented to the resources and not limited to the symptom perceived. Clement calls these resources the “erotic potential”.

With his arguments, Ulrich Clement helps the therapist to penetrate desire and sexuality focusing on both the couple’s relationship and the individual experience, bypassing the simple reading of the symptom as

sexual dysfunction or as an exclusively individual deficit. For example, during the anamnesis, he suggests to deal with the couple and discuss their sexual history and the critical phases they passed. At the individual level, personal notions of intimacy, desires and myths brought by each one are analyzed.

The therapy proposed by the author is not about restoring harmony between partners but about making them able to tolerate the conflict without that minimising their relationship. To “unify” their desires would become creation and maintenance of a sexual problem and it would lead to inevitable dissatisfaction inside the couple. To quote his own words, we must move from an “other-centered intimacy” to a “self-centered intimacy”, just because it is not enough to have sex in order to enjoy a satisfying sexuality.

Therefore, a sex therapy of the second generation is proposed, more adapted to the new times, very little related to anatomy but very connected to the relationship between the two partners through the couple’s ability to exploit their differences. Clement’s book therefore deserves the therapists’ attention and also of those who are committed to understanding the intricacies of intimate relationships.

Francesco Forcolin  
Sessuologo  
Foundation “Centro della Famiglia”  
Treviso, Italy