



Alin **Olteanu**, alin.olteanu@roehampton.ac.uk
University of Roehampton, United Kingdom

Towards a (bio-)semiotics of sexuality

I approach human sexuality from a semiotic position, using the biosemiotic notion of body, to discuss Peirce's evolutionary perspective on altruism. In the light of recent research in biosemiotics, semiotics brings the understanding of sexual activity as a semiotic competence of the body. As such, sexual desire and activity are not understood as merely biological impulses, as it has been regarded in classic Darwinism and psychoanalysis. From a semiotic perspective, sexual activity is a case of semiosis, an act of interpretation. I employ Peirce's theory of evolution to account for sexual activity as agapic semiosis. As such, sexual activity is understood as involving our entire being, as the most intimate manifestation of love or the most horrid form of violence.

Modern dualist philosophy did not develop the philosophical potentiality of sexuality. In this perspective, sexual desire has been understood as merely the result of egoistic biological impulses. The rationalist emphasis on mind as source of knowledge suggests that sexual activity, as a bodily activity, is unimportant. Empiricism as well can fail to see how such a rich sensorial activity as sexual activity can contribute to our conceptualization of the world. As a result, modern philosophy generated various ethical positions that either regard sex as negative or trivial, or justify it as merely impulsive (in the case of psychoanalysis). As semiotics accounts that human relations are primarily sensorial, it explains that sex can be the most insightful way of knowing another person, as well as the most harmful form of violence. Sexual activity is seen as semiosis, and, as such, as one of the highest expressions of agapic evolution. I explain that, using Peirce's terminology, sex is a metaphor and an argument.

In this perspective, sexual activity is neither stigmatized as morally wrong or justified as an impulse, necessary for reproduction. Peirce's theory of evolution claims that the principle of altruistic love (agape) brings together chance and necessity, transcending them. Therefore, using Peirce's taxonomy of signs and theory of evolution, sexual activity is understood as agapism, expressing chance, necessity and altruistic love altogether. Sexual abuse is understood as anancastic, an unsaturated phenomenon of signification which cannot transcend chance and necessity.

I conclude by discussing the consequences that the semiotic approach to sexuality has on attitudes towards sexual desire and activity and the new directions that it brings for sexual education.