

# “ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS SEX: TABOO, MODESTY, PREJUDICE, RETICENCE: CAN WE TALK ABOUT IT TOGETHER?”

*Translated by Luisa Bertolatti*

*We talk little about sexuality or rather sexual education at various levels of consciousness.*

*This article takes an in-depth look at the subject with scientific, psychological, psychosynthetic, literary and artistic references.*

*Is sexuality (still) really a taboo?*

I have tried to address the theme of sexuality by trying to play it down with this title. It is certainly a topic to be addressed with delicacy, serenity, seriousness, but above all, anchored to common feeling. Precisely for this reason it seems to have become a problem of political correctness, of conflicts, of different sensitivities, and is lost in a sea of misunderstandings.

Many years ago, we talked about it less, and perhaps we practiced it more? How was it practiced? Like today, but with less attention. Currently, according to the latest research by andrologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, it seems to have almost disappeared, because, with the use of social media, virtual reality (but what reality?) body fluids, physical contact, glances, breaths winks, rubbings, have disappeared, replaced by other vicarious forms. All this greatly complicates the art of loving as Eric Fromm would say. Still no taxes on the use of sex... An old film from 1975, “*Conviene Far Bene L’amore*” by Pasquale Festa Campanile, among the actors, Gigi Proietti, Agostina Belli, anticipated a future with no more energy resources on the planet, and thanks at the studies of a doctor who was a follower of William Reich, the energy produced by the sexual act was used to get factories and lighting and anything else that required electrical energy back into operation; the tragic comic aspect of the plot holds interesting reflections.

Another film from those years, by Woody Allen “*Everything you wanted to know about sex and never dared to ask*”, in a fine, obviously humorous way, traces vices, perversions, fixations and makes clear a vision of sexuality perhaps more effective than any sexology manual.

I will divide my writing into two parts, in the first I will provide some notes on the vision of Psychosynthesis on the Science of Sexuality, with some references to other psychological approaches, primarily psychoanalysis,

but without making a treatise on the tension between Eros, (life drive determined by libido) and Thanatos (destructive drive, death principle); in the second part I want to open a space on how, even today, we experience the famous *sexual question*.



*Morte e Vita - Gustav Klimt*

This term, *sexual question*, makes me think, playing in advance on the psychosynthetic vision, that already in the 1950s, there was a lot of talk about the Kinsey reports, which were part of two books on the sexual behavior of human beings, the first concerning man entitled: “*Sexual behavior in men*” and the other on women: “*The sexual behavior of women*”. In particular, Dr. Alfred Kinsey, a biologist, highlighted the prevalence of other different sexual orientations and in particular, disapproved of the use of the terms heterosexual and homosexual. The two scholars (Dr. Alfred Kinsey and Wardell Pomeroy, psychologist and sexologist) effectively replaced the three categories through their rating scale (so called Kinsey), concerning heterosexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality. This research was the subject of various criticisms in the scientific world, including those directed by Abraham Maslow, who contested the research data and the methodology which was based on 18,000 interviews.

Roberto Assagioli never contested any study of other disciplines similar to psychosynthesis, indeed, on the contrary, he has always looked for common points, favouring similarities rather than differences.

On the topic of sexuality, he talks about it in terms of *sexual energies*; declines them in the plural because instincts and impulses are part of our inner world, like the world of ideas, desires, emotions, feelings, each of these worlds vibrates with its own energy. So, these energies, with different vibrations and levels, move at the same time in our psychic dynamism, imagine, therefore, the overall complexity. I quote Assagioli directly: *“One of the most serious mistakes that is often committed by those who deal with the question of sex, is to study the instinctive and physical side of sexuality separately from its emotional, mental and spiritual aspects”*. (Psicosintesi Armonia della vita, ed. Mediterranee, Rome, page 135).

You can well understand the scope and influence that these *sexual energies* have on the personality, especially when they open up to youthful ardour, find fullness in youth, and are tempered in more mature age. Sexual impulses are not always accompanied by feelings of love; governing and managing these energies is a difficult undertaking. It is necessary to differentiate between love, eros and sex, which are different gradations of different types of energies; Eros is the bridge between the feeling of love and sex. Can there be love without sex and sex without love? What function does eros have? A phrase that has always struck me is that of Charles Bukowski who says: “A look is more indecent than going to bed together.” We could open extensive comments on this statement, the fact remains that the propulsive force of eros, the constancy of love and the physical expression of the force of creativity, sexuality, are all energies that celebrate Life.

Assagioli, speaking of the impetuosity of these energies, mentions the possibility of channelling them, to the point of being able to transform and even sublimate them.

Try giving this speech to a person in forced sexual abstinence, for various reasons, and you will see what they will answer. Assagioli is calm on the issue, and

bases his reflections on the laws of psychodynamics, in particular the ninth and tenth laws; but appeasing and/or venting sexual instincts and impulses is not easy. Arguing without a suitable context about the action of the will on the chaos of the personality at the mercy of the various psychic functions becomes, at best, in the eyes of those who are not prepared, absurd, unrealistic, if not vain. The training of the will, in its various aspects, is part of a project based on authentic motivation, a well-directed intention that requires time and planning, an authentic path of awareness.

Before closing this note on the vision of sexuality in Psychosynthesis, I would like to focus on a very important point which apparently seems very far from what has been described so far. It concerns one of the most insidious obstacles to spiritual development; to this end Assagioli recommends an adequate personal psychosynthesis before delving into transpersonal psychosynthesis. The harmonization of psychic energies around a unifying centre requires a gradual path, made up of moments of knowledge, then based on *know, possess and transform yourself*. On this path we encounter various obstacles: suffering, attachment, aggression, criticism, and among these: fear.

*“Fear - I quote Assagioli verbatim - does not only cause internal suffering; she is a terrible advisor, and often causes people to commit actions that are harmful to us and others. “There are people who end up being afraid of the fear itself. Fear is a poison that poisons man’s life.”*

There are five main forms of fear which underlie the five fundamental instincts.

The 1st is the instinct of preservation which has as its root the fear of death.

The 2nd is the sexual impulse, at the basis of which there is a sense of incompleteness and the fear of loneliness. And there is a lot to be said on this point. It is no coincidence that Assagioli’s last lecture in 1974 dealt with the theme of loneliness. It would be important to investigate the sense of loneliness, sexuality and frustration.

The 3rd instinct is the gregarious one, deriving from the individual’s fear of feeling separated, and which leads

him to feel the need for support and security in others. The 4th is the tendency towards affirmation, at the root of which lies the fear of not being appreciated. The 5th is the tendency to investigate, based on fear of the unknown.

These are just some hints, but the study of these instincts and impulses connected to each other offer important reflections on the bio basis on which the study of sexuality is based, and it is no coincidence that Biopsychosynthesis is the full name of Psychosynthesis. I remember that sexuality represents the thermometer of personality, and the sexual experience is not so far from the spiritual experience. It is a topic that I have already discussed in the past, but it always remains a key point of individual development.

Assagioli in the booklet *Psychology and the science of sexuality*, ed. Institute of Psychosynthesis, 1931, recommends the careful study of these energies, largely coming from instincts and impulses, identifying the various problems that affect both the medical, psychological, educational and social spheres; Although this writing is dated, it offers ideas and references that are still relevant today. In particular he mentions Sigmund Freud, whose theory Psychosynthesis also refers to.

The framework of psychoanalytic research starts from the study of the effects of the repression of sexual instincts and impulses. Freud initially based his research on hysteria (1895), a name deriving from the Greek (hystera- uterus), as he had observed that many disorders of young women, in particular, but later also found in men, were attributable to the repression of such energies of a sexual nature.

The entire system of psychoanalytic theory revolved through the studies of the young neurologist, Freud, who at the time caused a stir in the medical field by introducing the terms repression, the unconscious and infantile sexuality, see the Oedipus complex and that of Electra for little girls. Carl Gustav Jung later, and then Assagioli, while recognizing the great contribution of the Austrian scholar, went further in the study of the human psychic edifice.

Subsequent scholars start from the psychoanalytic

contribution, among these I remember Eric Fromm, "The art of loving", Alexander Lowen, "Love, sex and the heart". Michel Foucault, "History of Sexuality". But the study of sexuality also involves fields such as philosophy, spirituality (Tantra Yoga), medicine, education, training and other social fields.

But let's come to today; what does the research tell us? I will cite some titles of newspaper articles that I can summarize in this reflection of mine: *closeness of the heart, intimacy in love, are in serious difficulty, especially among the younger generations.*

Unfortunately, in the news there are more episodes of group violence and oppression than of tenderness and romantic approaches. There are many expanded visions of a 360° sexuality, a whole string of alphabetical letters LGBT+ Q, but these are weighed down by judgements, prejudices, political raids, which pollute the most beautiful human feeling which is based on the mutual attraction between two human beings: love.

Sex, sexuality cannot be regulated by laws, just like love.

Here are some headlines I found in some newspapers:

"Without making love, having children becomes difficult", "There is less and less sex". "Virtual, surrogate sex. Decrease in desire". Yet both female and male images with marked sexual references are abundant around us, posters, advertisements, television.

Another title, "Alarm from andrologists: Help, no more sex!". And then again, "One in 3 teenagers only does it online", 1.6 million people between 18 and 35 have never had sexual intercourse and 220 thousand couples have decided to stop doing so. Numbers that according to the Italian psychiatrist Paolo Crepet will only increase. When there is a form of indigestion, the desire to eat that food eventually decreases.

However, there are scholars who disagree on the demonization of technology. Even regarding pornography, it was noted that it has always been there; what is missing today is sentimental education, a tragically current term given the violence suffered by some young women, even without sexual implications.

Sentimental education arises from emotional literacy,

from sensitivity to the beauty and essentiality of living; and we return to educational issues, to the rebounds between school and family which are based on clashes rather than meetings.

To conclude these reflections of mine, I report a poem which in my opinion contains both the sentimental and the emotional, physical and spiritual side, a synthesis of what is called love:

(free translation)

*I went down a million stairs, giving you my arm,  
and now that you are not there  
there is emptiness at every step.  
even so, our long journey was short.  
mine still goes on and i no longer need it.  
coincidences, bookings,  
the traps, the hurts of those who believe  
that reality is what you can see.*

*I have descended millions of stairs giving you my arm  
not because with four eyes you maybe see more.  
with you i walked them because i knew about us two,  
the only true pupils, even though blurred now,  
that were yours.*

*Poem by Eugenio Montale*

