

On Amorous Reality in the Time of Likes

Lic. Psych. Martina Burdet Dombald

Our hypermodern era (Lipovetsky, 2006) generates a miracle, a euphoria, derived from the set formed by informatics and new technologies. We are all connected – to each other and to machines – in a universe where the avalanche of data and images constructs a new phenomenon within a revolutionary temporality dominated by presentism and acceleration. We live progressively more on different types of screens – online, on life; all more or less augmented, albeit prolonged by a smartphone that expands our physical and psychic skin-ego. Today, it is even possible to mix the human flesh with that silicone from love dolls. Overarousal all around in the streets, uncontrolled free porn, sex often fractured from love turning into hard, or discharge, sex. In front of this background, the amorous thread or its impossibility are weaved. I wrote elsewhere “I@ve,”^[1] traversed by the at sign – a true assault against the good use of the language – as a metaphor to symbolize the articulation between the digital culture and affection, an individual’s internal world and intersubjectivity.

Loving – since the adolescent amorous choice that supposes the renouncement of the primary parental objects in childhood – means being able to recognize and desire someone else for their intrinsic qualities, their otherness, which entails having successfully overcome the narcissist completeness. Today, nevertheless, we see emerge with force a new amorous order marked by the weakening of Eros while Narcissus sings at the top of his lungs. In some respects, the other has become banal, holding no quality, replaceable as though it was a merchandise; in other respects, the other – the symbolic Other thanks to which one constructs oneself as a subject according to the Lacanian theory – finds itself denied, relegated in favor of a process of auto-breeding through which one obtains the maximum pleasure of feeling as the creator of oneself; God for a moment. The discontent of the narcissist hell is a threat as Eros does not open the possibility of experiencing the other in their otherness (Kristeva, 1993).

From a Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, to say that Eros loses power in our “liquid” society (Bauman, 2003) equates to highlighting the fragilization of the driving forces that bind the life and death drives. Unbinding in Freud (1920) and disobjectalization in Green (1986), as an attack against the object. If Eros no longer opens the possibility of experiencing the other in their otherness, it threatens once again the discontent of the narcissist hell.

This phenomenon is represented in its most extreme version in Japan by the *hikikomori*, to whom the other is completely swept away from life – a life that happens exclusively online. It is possible to interpret this phenomenon as the purest exponent of the desire for no desire (Aulaigner, 1975), another form of death drive, or as a psychic refuge (Steiner, 1995).

Besides the pathological extreme of *hikikomori*, the hypermodern world bathes itself in the hyper, in the lack of measure. The infosphere produces, in a fraction of a second, a flux of stimuli of such a magnitude that the psychism is not capable of metabolizing – a fact conceptualized from the Freudian economic perspective as traumatic – which complicates the psychic task of binding. The issue of limits is challenged: the working through of grieves can be eluded by replacing the lost object with masses of online profiles, mainly floods of images, as a refreshing and relevant means of expression that sweeps away the narration (Lyotard, 1979) and also contributes to the erasing of the other.

It is worth noting that the profiles offered by online applications – either just with photos, or sometimes

accompanied by some text – are treated by powerful algorithms that have chosen on our behalf. This means that everyone can find themselves in face of the danger of becoming a piece of data that chooses another piece of data. In such cases, there would be a coincidence between the discourse of the Capital and that of business rentability, both aiming to annul our desire, or to “desire” on our behalf. We fall onto an objectivization of the affections without clearly understanding it.

There is no psychic creation without an Other who can provide an initial pleasure, a first mirrored look, as well as a tolerable frustration that enables the possibility of hallucinating and creating representations in their absence. The I is other. And today, there is an attempt to erase this fact, which is structuring of subjectivity. The I does not want from the Other. In its place, emerge ideals that proclaim non-stop pleasure, or the attainment of maximum pleasure through that which I called auto-breeding (Burdet, op. cit.). It is the delicious phenomenon of autocreación of a self that exhibits itself in the social networks, even for a second, hungry for likes. Ovation of the I, who gets majestically inflated, tends to become almighty, and, paradoxically, is fragile, since it depends on likes provided by an Other who is, more often than not, unknown and reduced to this sole function. Instead of dying of love, today it is possible to die of likes. The ideal I imposes itself.

Like, as in “I like you.” It is also the new amorous currency that feels nothing and is provided by giants such as Facebook. A new discontent while we pass from the discourse to the image. The libido has been, in these cases, removed from the object and redirected towards the I.

From both sides – the subject in an exhibitionist demand and the onlooking object – there is a deterioration of the discourse, which turned into *peau de chagrin*, a sort of dwindling skin. It is important to stress that what is shown of oneself are constructed, retouched images, previously chosen by an I, an unconscious, some affections, and some ideals. This means that what is offered for the construction of the online self (*moi*) differs from the I (*je*) and is a representation closer to the imaginary field than to the symbolic one, in Lacanian terms.

Although the narcissist tint is clear here, it offers a different shade to the classic theory of narcissism as defined by Freud (1914) when drawing from the Ovidian myth in which Narcissus falls in love with his own image. One looks at oneself online in the image reflected within social networks; an image previously chosen with social intentions and which is in turn reflected from others. From the perspective of psychoanalytical practice, we can consider, on one side, a risk of fragmentation and difficulties in the creation of the subject, and, on the other, the possible connection between this phenomenon and recent themes that emerge, such as polyamory and the polybelongings of all kinds.

[1] Burdet, M. (2018). *Amar en tiempos de Internet. ¿Me am@s o me follow?* [Love in the Time of the Internet. Do you I@ve me or do you follow me?]. Madrid: Underbau.

References

- Aulagnier, P. (1975), *La violence de l'interprétation*. Paris: PUF.
- Bauman, Z. (2003), Titre original : *Liquid Love*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. *L'amour liquide. De la fragilité des liens ente les hommes*. Paris: Hachette Littératures
- Freud, S. (1920), *Au delà du principe du plaisir*.
- Green, A. (1986), Primer Simposio de la Federación Europea de Psicoanálisis. Marsella. La pulsión de mort. Paris: PUF. *Pulsión de muerte, narcisismo negativo, función desobjetalizante*. En La pulsión de muerte. Madrid: Amorrortu editores (1989).
- Godart, E. (2018), *La psychanalyse va-t-elle disparaître?* Paris: Albin Michel.

Kristeva, J. (1993), *Les nouvelles maladies de l'âme*. Paris: Fayard.

Lipovetsky, G. (2006). *Le bonheur paradoxal. Essai sur la société de l'hyperconsommation*, NRF Essais; Folio Essais 256.

Lyotard, J.F. (1979), *La condition postmoderne*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit.

Steiner, J (1995), Titre original: *Psychic Retreats*. London: Routledge, 1995. *Refugios psíquicos*. APM. Biblioteca Nueva, 2013. *Retraits psychiques*. Le fil rouge. Paris: PUF

Translation: Gabriel Hirschhorn