

Monstrous Love and Capitalist Logic

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Today there exists a radical separation between sex and love - especially in western secular societies - and both have changed. Sexual relationships have become transactional and uninhibited between consenting adults. With the fall of patriarchy, the “law of the father” is also less operative, meaning, that which sought to regulate and define the sexual and couple relationship no longer functions. However, if so-called “fixed roles” once helped couples stay together, they also caused a lot of suffering as couples who should have separated stuck together, this occurring against a backdrop of inequality between the heterosexual couple (e.g., economic) and the denial of rights/persecution towards those subjects who fell outside this “nor-male”. What has been unveiled, in the absence of a supposed universal conception of the “sexual relation”, is that, if love is sought, each subject must now do so under the “law of contingency”, finding singular ways for the couple to exist. Here, the “miracle of love” can be simply stated, it is wanting again, and again, a particular other. On the male side this has to do with the phallic value bestowed on the beloved (against the tendency to move from one desired object to another), while for the woman it is a question of a metaphorical suppleance whereby the lover becomes the beloved - as exception - rather than remaining in the series of “all men”.

We can thus ask is this knot becoming more difficult to make in our contemporary era, and if so, what is the nature of this difficulty? A partial answer to this question can be made by attending to how the “logic of capitalism” has infiltrated almost every aspect of human life. The slogans are familiar, your happiness depends on “self-optimisation” etc., or as Lacan succinctly put it, the superego today says: “Enjoy!”¹

Zygmunt Bauman in exploring the impact of consumer capitalism on human life argues that modern life has definitively shifted to being more liquid and in a state of constant flux.² This occurs at the level of the individual, communities, institutions and globally making life for most people more insecure. Here subjects experience greater anxiety and “life goals” become limited to avoiding bad things happening. Love approached through this lens brings the question, how does this benefit me?³ In a world where consumption, a basically solitary activity, is king, love, which was never a commodity but an event, is slipping from view. Eva Illouz adds that today, couples increasingly enter into “negative bonds”, meaning that relationships have fuzzy, unclear, undefined and contested purposes and in which the option of “unloving” the other is ever present.⁴ It has become, she states, a space of “radical uncertainty” for contemporary subjects.

As analysts we know this and respond, beyond any idea of norms or standards, to what is essential for each one.

¹ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX. Encore.* ed. J-A Miller, trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 1998, p.3.

² Bauman, Z., *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Polity Press, 2007.

³ Bauman, Z., *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Polity Press, 2003.

⁴ Illouz, E., *The End of Love*. Polity Press, 2021.