

Love That Does Not Hurt

Markus Zöchmeister

Cultural achievements have always influenced the relationship between people and their objects of satisfaction, and in this way, they have interfered in the structure of love and mourning. I recall Freud's explanation in *Civilization and its Discontents*, where he talks about the progress of civilization, which in sum makes our lives easier but has not solved the question of happiness (*Glück*). Freud says, "If there had been no railway to conquer distances, my child would never have left his native town and I should need no telephone to hear his voice [...]"¹ He compares these cultural achievements to cheap pleasures "the enjoyment obtained by putting a bare leg from under the bedclothes on a cold winter night and drawing it in again."² The question of desire is not resolved by those cultural objects of surplus-enjoyment, objects that, unlike the object *petit a*, are neither elided nor masked but simply always present. Coca Cola, for example: even if I only drink one Coke a year, it is still there for me every day of the year. Something fundamental has changed regarding the status of the lost object and the subject's relationship to its amorous passions, as you can read in Patricia Bosquin-Caroz' argument for the NLS-Congress.³

In *Seminar X*, Jacques Lacan quotes the philosopher and historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson as saying that life, existence, "is an unbroken power of active separations"⁴, and in doing so, he refers to the abyss where the place of lack is established.

What is this power, a capacity for active, continued separations to which we owe our existence? In *Seminar VI*, Lacan shows that Hamlet must go beyond the mourning of another, Laertes, with whom he identifies, in order to find his desire and thus to act. Later in *Seminar X*, he refers in this regard to the difference between two types of identifications: with the image *i(a)*, which is the subject of mourning, and with the object *petit a*, which occurs in melancholia. Mourning is fixated on the image of the object wrenched from reality, from which the subject must bid farewell a second time in the work of mourning, and this for the sole reason "of restoring the bond with the true object of relation, the masked object, the object *a* [...]"⁵ In other words, mourning is the condition for what Freud calls

¹ Freud, S. (1930). "Civilisation and its Discontents" (1930), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI*, London: Hogarth Press, 1961, p. 88.

² *Ibid.*

³ Bosquin-Caroz, P., *Painful Love. Presentation of the 2025 NLS Congress Theme*, 2024, pp. 3-4.

⁴ Lacan, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A.R. Price, Cambridge: Polity, 2014, p. 145.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

the capacity for love, the capacity for a continued separation from the objects that have necessarily been snatched from us by the contingencies of life.

And today? When the partner you are looking for is virtually found on a dating platform, this is initially not a partner of love choice but assigned by the algorithm of the machine, which acts as a guarantee for any replacement. This partner wears the colour of the machine, his loss is replaceable and therefore not a loss that makes a hole in the real. One would have to turn this machine partner into a subject of speech, so that when it is gone, one can say that *I was its lack*. It is striking that patients take umbrage at these machines and condemn them after failed attempts that leave no trace of sadness in them.