

We live all of this, subjectively, in a paradoxical mode, since these masses coexist in us with the intelligent and voluntary being who condemns and scorns them. No one knows what the true opposite of consciousness is—unless it be this unconscious of repression that psychoanalysis has imposed upon us. But perhaps our true unconscious is in this ironic power of withdrawal, of nondesire, nonknowledge, silence, absorption then expulsion of all powers, wills, of all enlightenment and depths of meaning, because of an insistence which is thereby bathed in the light of a ridiculous looking halo. Our unconscious might not be composed of desires properly sworn to the sad destiny of repression. It might not even be repressed at all. It would instead be made up out of what's left after this joyous expulsion of all encumbering superstructures of being and will.

We always had a sad vision of the masses (alienated), a sad vision of the unconscious (repressed). Upon our entire philosophy lies the heavy weight of these sad correlations. If only for the sake of change, it would be interesting to conceive of the masses, the object-masses, as possessing a delusive, illusive, allusive strategy, corresponding to an unconscious that is finally ironic, joyous and seductive.

### **The Evil Genie of Passion**

About love you can say anything, but you don't know what to say. Love exists, and that's about it. You love your mother, God, nature, a woman, little birds and flowers: the term, become the leitmotif of our deeply sentimental culture, is the most strongly emotional one in our language, but also the most diffuse, vague, and unintelligible. Compared to the crystalline state of seduction, love is a liquid, even a gaseous solution. Everything is soluble in love, by love. The

resolution, the dissolution of all things into a passionate harmony or a subconjugal libido, love is a kind of universal answer, the hope of an ideal conviviality, the virtuality of a world of relations in fusion. Hate separates; love unites. Eros is what binds, couples, conjugates, foments associations, projections, identifications. "Love one another." Who ever could have said: "Seduce one another"?

I prefer the form of seduction, which maintains the hypothesis of an enigmatic duel, of a violent solicitation or attraction, which is a form not of response, but of challenge, of a secret distance and perpetual antagonism that allows the playing out of a rule—I prefer this form and its pathos of distance to that of love and its pathetic rapprochement. I prefer the dual form of seduction to the universal form of love. (Heraclitus: it is the antagonism of elements, beings and gods which comprises the game of becoming, not a universal solvent, or an amorous con-fusion—here the gods affront and seduce each other; and love, when it comes along with Christianity as the principle of creation, will put an end to this great game.)

It is possible to speak of seduction because it is a dual and intelligible form, while love is a universal and unintelligible one. It may be even that only seduction is truly a form, while love is only the diffuse metaphor of the fall of beings into individuation and the compensatory invention of a universal energy that would incline these beings to each other. By what providential effect, by what miracle of will, by what stroke of theatre would beings have been destined to love one another, by what crazy imagination could one conceive that "I love you," that people love each other, that we love each other? Here we are dealing with the wildest projection of a universal principle of attraction and equilibrium, pure phantasmagoria. Subjective phantasmagoria, modern passion *par excellence*.

Where there is no longer game or rule, a law and affect must be invented, a mode of universal effusion, a form of salvation to overcome the separation of souls and bodies, to put an end to hatred, predestination, discrimination, fate: this is our gospel of sentimentality, putting an end to seduction as fate.

This elevation of love to the highest level of divine right, to an ethical form of universal fulfillment (love still serves everywhere as moral justification for happiness), has thrown seduction into a vaguely immoral, vaguely perverse zone, a form of playing preliminary to love. Love remains the only serious or sublime finality, the only possible absolution for an impossible universe. Any concern with providing seduction with other titles of nobility runs up against mechanisms of sublimation and idealization which are those of love.

Seduction is linked not to affects but to the fragility of appearance; it has no model and seeks no form of salvation—it is therefore immoral. It obeys no morality of exchange; it is based rather on the pact, the challenge and the alliance, which are not universal and natural forms, but artificial and initiatory ones. It is therefore frankly perverse.

The matter is complicated further by the play of terminology. Neither seduction nor love being precise notions (they have no place in the great conceptual systems, nor in psychoanalysis), they can easily switch or be confused. So if one takes seduction to be a challenge, a game where the bets are never down, an uninterrupted ritual exchange, an infinite escalation of the ante, a secret complicity, etc., one can always answer: “But so defined, wouldn’t seduction be simply love?”

We can even invert the relation and make love something more decisive, more challenging than seduction. Love is fulfillment only

if you think of it, say, narcissistically: I love the other because he is like me, therefore I duplicate myself—I love the other because he is my opposite; therefore I complete myself. However, one can conceive of love as gratuitous, as an *élan* towards the other that expects no answer, as a challenge that incites the other to love me more than I love him, therefore as a perpetually higher bid, while one can also take seduction as endgame, a tactic that attempts to manipulate the other to one's own ends.

There's no argument possible against turning these terms around. Seduction and love may exchange their sublime and most vulgar meanings, which makes it almost impossible to talk about them. All the more so in that we are caught up today in a revival of the discourse of love, a reactivation of the affect by *ennui* and saturation. An effect of amorous simulation. Mad love, love as passion, are quite dead as heroic and sublime movements. What is at stake today is a demand for love, affect, passion, at a time when the need for it is cruelly felt. A whole generation has gone through the liberation of desire and of pleasure, a whole generation that is tired of sex and which reinvents love as an affective or passionate supplement. Other generations, romantic or postromantic, have lived it as passion, destiny. Our own is only neoromantic.

After so much sexual bathos, here we have the neopathos of the amorous relation. After the libidinal and instinctual, here is the neoromanticism of passion. But it is no longer a matter of predestination or fatality, it's only a matter of liberating one potentiality among others and, after such a long phase of "repressive desublimation," as Marcuse would say, of clearing the way for a progressive resublimation.

Sex—like the relations of production—was too simple. It is never too late to go beyond Marx and Freud.



There is, then, a kind of love that is only the froth of a culture of sex, and we shouldn't have too many illusions about this new apparatus of ambiance. Forms of simulation can be recognized by the fact that nothing sets them off from each other; sex, love, seduction, perversion, porn, can all coexist on one and the same libidinal band, without exclusivity, with the blessing of psychoanalysis. A stereophonic concerto: one adds love, passion, seduction to sex in exactly the same way psychosociology and "teamwork" were added to the assembly line.

This situation is interesting as a symptom of the exhaustion of a whole obscene constellation of sexuality (obscene not because of sex itself, but because of the obscenity of truth when it is spoken and revealed). We've come to the end of the cycle of sexuality as truth. This makes possible once again a reversion to forms whose profile and charm found themselves eclipsed by the hegemonic perspective of sex.

To find again a kind of distinction, a hierarchy for all these figures—seduction, love, passion, desire, sex—is without doubt an absurd wager, but it's the only one we have left.

In our culture, seduction has known a kind of golden age, which lasted from the Renaissance to the 18th century: it is then—like politeness, or court manners—a conventional, aristocratic form, a game of strategy without any special connection to love. The latter has for us tonalities that are different, ulterior, romantic and romanesque: no longer a game or a ceremony, it is a passion, a discourse. What sweeps you away is the force of desire; what calls you is death. It has nothing to do with seduction. Love, of course, knew courtly forms, in the Mediterranean culture of the thirteenth century. But the meaning it has for us was fashioned essentially at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth,

counter to the superficial game of seduction. There occurs a rupture between a form of dual game of strategic illusion and a new individual finality of fulfillment of desire, whose great advent is that of the constellation of desire, whether sexual or psychic, of the individual, or political desire of the masses. Whatever the case may be with this desire and its "liberation," it no longer has anything to do with the aristocratic game of challenge and seduction.

Another thing: seduction is pagan, love is Christian. It is Christ who begins wanting to love and to be loved. Religion becomes affect, suffering and love, none of which the archaic and ancient mythologies cared about in the least; for them the world's sovereignty resides in the regulated play of signs and appearances, in ceremonials of metamorphosis, and therefore in acts of seduction *par excellence*. No affect in any of this, no love, nothing like a great divine or natural flux, no need of psychology, either, of this subjective interiority where the myth of love will flower.<sup>4</sup> Only the ritual exists, and ritual is in the realm of seduction. Love is born from the destruction of ritual forms, from their liberation. Its energy is an energy of the dissolution of these forms, including the magic rituals of the seduction of the world (which continued in Christian heresies, in the form of Manichean or revolutionary denials of the real world). Cruel, rigorous forms of the sign in its pure functioning, opposed

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4. But if you take seduction in the Christian sense, then everything changes: seduction begins with Christianity; it is the diabolical curse that comes to fracture the divine order—or else it is Christ himself, according to Nietzsche, Christ come to seduce people to his own person, come to pervert them with psychology and love? Conversely, there is no seduction in Greece, where love is homosexual and pedagogic—a virtue, not a passion.

to the reality of the world, a mastery of pure appearances, without psychology, without affect, without love. The maximal intensity of these cultures—from which love and its entire metaphysics of salvation issue as if by decomposition—is an effusion of forms until then secret, initiatory, jealous of themselves, intensive, whereas love is a proselytizing energy, radiant and extensive—exoteric, whereas ritual is esoteric. Love is expression, heat, avowal, communication, and therefore a passage of energy from a potential, concentrated state to one that is liberated, radiating, caloric, and thereby endemic and degraded. It will therefore be the ferment of a popular and democratic religion, as opposed to hierarchical and aristocratic orders governed by rule.

Love is the end of the rule and the beginning of the law. It is the beginning of a disorder where things will be ordered according to feeling, affective investment, that is to say, a heavy substance, heavy with meaning, and no longer according to the play of signs—a lighter substance, more ductile, more superficial. God is going to love his own, which he had never done, and the world will no longer be a game. We have inherited all of this—and love is only the effect of this dissolution of rules and of the energy liberated by this fusion. The form opposite to love would then be observance: wherever a rule and a game are reinvented, love disappears. Compared to the regulated and highly conventional intensities of the game or the ceremony, love is a system of freely circulating energy. It is therefore charged with a whole ideology of liberation and free circulation; it is the pathos of modernity.

The distinctive quality of a universal passion like love is that it is individual and that everyone finds himself alone in it. Seduction is dual: I cannot seduce if I am not already seduced, no one can seduce me if he is not already seduced. No one can play without

another—that is the basic rule—while I may love without being loved in return. I love without being loved, that's my problem. If I don't love you, that's your problem. If someone doesn't please me, that's his problem. This is why jealousy is like a natural dimension of love while it is foreign to seduction—the affective bond is never absolutely sure, whereas the pact of signs is without ambiguity and without appeal. Furthermore, to seduce someone is not to invest him, nor to absorb him psychologically; seduction does not know this territorial jealousy that goes by the name of love.

I am not saying that love is only jealousy, but that some well-tempered jealousy always enters into it, something exclusive, some subjective claim. Perhaps it even precedes love: a primordial passion, as with the Greek gods, who know neither love nor sentimentality but are already tremendously jealous of each other.

To love someone is to isolate him from the world, wipe out every trace of him, dispossess him of his shadow, drag him into a murderous future. It is to circle around the other like a dead star and absorb him into a black light. Everything is gambled on an exorbitant demand for the exclusivity of a human being, whoever it may be. This is doubtless what makes it a passion: its object is interiorized as an ideal end, and we know that the only ideal object is a dead one.

In comparison to seduction, love would be, then, a looser form, a more far-reaching solution and even a way of dissolution. But a pathetic dissolution, at least in its more elevated forms, those that have produced the novel, for instance. This pathetic relief is going to disappear in the later peripety, which is simply that of sexuality. The latter becomes only a relational style articulated on the “objective” difference between the sexes. Seduction is still ceremonial, love is still pathetic, but sexuality is no longer anything but relational. From one form to another, what is at stake in signs is eliminated in



favor of organic, energetic, and economic functioning, based on the smallest possible difference, that between the sexes.

It's a mystification, in effect, to think of sexual difference as original difference, the source of all other differences, which would be only metaphors for this one. This is to forget that from time immemorial men have produced greater differential intensities through artificial systems than from bodies and biology. At least they have never thought of "natural" differences as anything but a particular example of artificial ones. Literally, pure sexual difference is of no interest. (Yin and Yang are another thing: these are two metaphysical poles between which exist the tensions that organize the world.) In certain cultures the differences warrior/nonwarrior, brahmin/nonbrahmin mean a lot more than sexual difference: they produce more differential energy, they organize things with more rigor and complexity. In all cultures except our own, the distinction between dead and alive, noble and ignoble, initiated and noninitiated, is infinitely more significant than the distinction between the sexes. Sexuality signals, in fact, with its biological and pretentious evidence, the weakest and poorest difference, the one that's left over after all other differences have been lost.

Any naturalistic principle of differentiation is necessarily weaker, and is far from being able to support—as is the powerful artifice of signs—a meticulous arrangement, a ceremony of the world.

Seduction is the era of an aesthetic and ceremonial difference between the sexes.

Love (passion) is the era of a moral and affective sexual difference.

Sexuality is the era of psychological, biological and political difference between the sexes.

This is why seduction is more intelligible than love: because it operates at the level of a higher form, a dual form, a perfect

differential form. Sex, of all differential forms, is the one where difference matters least. As to love, it is found always occupying an intermediary place in the spectral parade of figures: from the limits of seduction to the borders of sex, it describes a universe which goes from a pure form of difference to an equally pure one of indifference—but it doesn't have its own form and, as such, it is indescribable. It is not the dual form of seduction that is mysterious, it is, rather, the individual figure of the subject tracked by his own desire or in quest of his own image.

Destiny is imposed on us with stunning irrefutability: but it is nondestiny that needs to be explained. This, too, is all we can really do with it: rationalize it. Because somehow, profoundly, as with love's banality, there's nothing to say about it.

Seduction is not mysterious; it is enigmatic. The enigma, like the secret, is not unintelligible.

It is, on the contrary, fully intelligible, but it cannot be said or revealed. Such is seduction: inexplicable evidence. Such is the game. At the heart of any game is a fundamental, secret rule, an enigma; nevertheless, the whole process is no mystery; nothing is more intelligible than a game in progress.

Love itself is charged with all the world's mystery, but it's not enigmatic. It is, on the contrary, heavy with meaning, being of the order, not of the enigmatic but of the solution. "The key to the enigma is love," or more brutally: "Sex is at the bottom of everything." (Miraculous truth, revealed in the 20th century, but why? Don't believe a word of it: the enigma remains entire and retains all its seductive power.)

From one figure to the other, from seduction to love, then to desire, sexuality, finally to pure and simple porno; the farther you

go, the closer you come to the lesser secret, the smaller enigma, towards avowal, expression, unveiling, liberation of the repressed; the closer you come to truth, in a word, which soon becomes, in the obscenity of our culture, the compulsory statement of truth, the forced confession, the obliged revelation... of what, moreover? Of nothing, exactly. There is nothing to reveal.

From where could there have originated the crazy idea of revealing the secret, exposing the bare substance, touching radical obscenity? That, in itself, is a utopia. There is no real, there never was a real. Seduction knows this, and preserves its enigma. All other forms, and love in particular, are gossipy and prolix. They say too much, they want to say too much. Love talks a lot, it's a discourse. It declares itself and culminates often in this declaration where it is at an end. Highly ambiguous act of language, almost indecent; these things aren't said; how can you say to someone "I love you"? They appear too fragile to be wrapped in an enunciation, unless that is the only life they really have, in which case they are no longer secret at all. These things live only in their silence, or on their denial: "I don't love you at all," or even "I won't see you anymore," phrases still weighted with the challenge and suspense of seduction, imminence of love, but which still maintain, by the grace of denial, a quality of game, a lightness of lure.

Happily, anyway, "I love you" does not mean what it says, and it should be understood otherwise—in the seductive mood (all verbs have a secret mood, beyond the indicative and imperative, the seductive). Seduction is a modality of all discourse, including the discourse of love (at least, let's hope so). Which means that it plays games with its enunciation and affects the other differently than stated. So with "I love you"; isn't it said not to tell you you're loved, but to seduce you? It is a proposition that oscillates on its two sides,

and which thereby retains the insoluble charm of appearances, of what is senseless and therefore useless to believe. Believing "I love you" puts an end to everything, including love, since that would be to accord meaning to that which has none.

This is a best-case scenario, when ambiguity still controls discourse. In the case of sexual demand, there is no longer a trace of ambiguity. Everything is meant, all is said, there is no secret demand, all is in its expression. If desire is really being avowed, then it would be enough to hear the words of confession, the play of appearances would be useless. Likewise, "I love you" then takes on another meaning; it is no longer seductive, it is no more than a desperate optative: "I demand to love you," "I demand that you love me."

We can agree with Lacan: there is no sexual rapport, there is no truth of sex. Either "I love you" and "I desire you" mean something else entirely—seduction—or they signify a demand for the love of desire, never love or sex in themselves. There's always a missed rendezvous, and sexuality, as Lacan has it, is the story of this missed meeting. But that isn't the last word, because the subtler spiral of seduction describes not the history but the game of the missed encounter, and also that other pleasure it knows how to soak from this charming and absurd difference that nature has put between the sexes.

And so what was challenge and seduction ends in solicitude. Seduce me, love me, make me come, pay attention to me. Characteristic and obsessional trait, that can go all the way to an almost fetal demand for love (the fetal strategies).

There has been, for the last two or three centuries in our culture, an overdetermination of all forms of love (including love of nature) through maternal love and the sentimentality that derives



from it. Seduction alone escapes this, because it is not a demand but a challenge; it opposes this overdetermination the way the duel is opposed to fusion.

That kind of love (maternal) is no more than a floating libido that is vented just about everywhere and tries desperately to invest its environment, according to an economy that is no longer that of passionate systems but that of subsystems of intensity—cold and dispassionate. Ecological libido, a product specific to our epoch, spread out everywhere in homeopathic and homeostatic doses, is the minimal differential of affect that is enough to fuel social and psychological demand. Floating, it can be drained, diverted, magnetized from one niche to another, according to the flow. It corresponds ideally to an order of manipulation.

And so the energy of dissolution of seduction passes into the passionate order of love, and ends up in the aleatory order of demand.

Fortunately, there is a backfire, which corrects all that I've just said about demand. For by responding in the terms in which the situation is posed—in which it pretends to be posed—one runs the risk of misunderstanding. Perhaps it is simply soliciting—in its very hysteria—being denied, being refused, being disappointed, seeking the reply that that's not how things really happen. Just as any other discourse is proffered only in the hope of being denied and exorcized, so the demand can, actually, be only toying with the confession of desire, the call to solicitude of another, in order to set a trap for him, to lure and therefore seduce him.