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The Disappearance of the Other: A Note on the Distortion of Love

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Abstract Against the backdrop of contemporary sociological theories of love, this article explores the disappearance of the other in contemporary love relationships by focusing on the relationship between love and depression. The aim of the article is twofold: first, to provide a theoretical framework to be able to grasp in what ways the other is threatened with erosion in contemporary love relationships and why this may cause depression; second, to exemplify it with empirical data consisting of human documents such as novels, interviews, sms- and messenger-correspondence. The first section, excluding the introduction, consists of methodological reflections. The second section introduces Hegel's thinking on love and discusses the perception of it by thinkers such as Honneth, Sartre, and Beauvoir, as well as its parallels with Giddens's idea on confluent love as a new egalitarian paradigm for equality in intimate relationships. The third section is mainly devoted to Kristeva's theory of the melancholic-depressive composite, but also introduces Illouz's concept of autotelic desire. In the fourth section, Han's idea of "the erosion of difference" and Bauman's thinking on "the broken structure of desire" are discussed in relation to the use of Tinder in contemporary culture. The fifth section consists of an analysis of excerpts from contemporary love novels and interviews that illustrates the disappearance of the other in contemporary love relationships. In the sixth section, a number of longer passages from a messenger conversation, ranging over a couple of months in duration, is reproduced and interpreted, mainly by help of Kristeva's thinking, in order to make visible the relation between the erosion of the other and melancholic depression. The article ends with a short conclusion.

Keywords Love; Freedom; Personal Identity; Intimate Relationships; Intersubjectivity; Other-Silencing; Melancholic Depression; Hegel; Kristeva; Giddens

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Few interpersonal phenomena have been described and explored as much as love. It is therefore difficult to say something completely new about love. However, society and culture are constantly changing, which means that the social conditions for love look different depending on the type of society and culture to which we belong. Over the past three decades, many sociologists have studied the structural transformation of modern society and its implications for love. Among them, we find Anthony Giddens (1992), who argues for the emergence of “confluent love,” which he understands as a new egalitarian paradigm for equality in intimate relationships. In contrast to romantic love, which includes an ideal of a lifelong relationship between man and woman, organized by existing ideas of masculinity and femininity, confluent love explores new ways of being in a relationship, which potentially dissolves the unequal power dynamics between men and women. In contemporary culture, love to a greater extent is something that is negotiated through a dialogue of mutual self-disclosure between equal subjects who express their needs and desires. It could thus be said that love is increasingly dependent on each partner’s ability and willingness to be vulnerable in the face of each other and therefore must be based on interpersonal trust. Since confluent love is a communicative act, it is also dependent on the ability of the partners to distinguish themselves from each other. “Intimacy is not being absorbed by the other, but knowing his or her characteristics and making available one’s own,” says Giddens (1992:94).

Although romantic love remains the dominant ideology, it is no longer viable in a world where sexual-

ity and gender are not taken for granted, but a work in progress. Higher rates of divorces and same-sex marriages indicate that the ideal of romantic love is questioned and that we live in a time and place where we need to try out and experiment with new forms of being in a relationship. This claim has support among sociologists who argue that the structural transformation of modern society in form of individualization, that is, individuals’ rights to pursue their interests, pleasures, and desires as long as they respect the rights of others and the common good, has resulted in the erosion of the ideology of romantic love (see, e.g., Smart 2007; Inglis 2013). Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995) capture this change by speaking of “the normal chaos of love,” which, according to Jeffrey Weeks (2007:8), can be seen as “a revolution in everyday life, which has yet unrealized and unsettling implications for the relationship between private passions and public life.” Also globalization is seen as crucial for the changes that have taken place in intimate relationships, since it allows for mixed relationships across borders and cultures, as well as digital- and long-distance relationships, all of them demanding new practices of sexuality and love (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Plummer 2015).

Many sociologists argue that the social conditions of love have changed during modernity and that this affects the ways sexuality and love are performed. However, they do not embrace Giddens’s optimism for the potential of the ideal of confluent love to overcome unequal power dynamics within relationships. Lynn Jamieson (2011:12) views contemporary love as practices of intimacy, which “enable, generate, and sustain a subjective sense of

closeness and being attuned and special to each other”, but emphasizes that intimate relationships are still structured by inequalities (Jamieson 1999:477). Eva Illouz (2007:30) even suggests, “Giddens’s analysis only resonates with the psychological credo that celebrates equality in intimate relationships and has failed to interrogate the very transformation of intimacy it purports to describe.” As she understands it, advice and exercises in literature on intimacy about the importance of, for example, telling each other one’s interests, pleasures, and desires point at a process of rationalization which counteracts intimacy rather than a new ethic of personal life. “In the context of close relationships, intimacy, like self-realization and other categories invented by psychologists, became a code word for ‘health’...In this narrative, an absence of intimacy now pointed to one’s faulty emotional make-up, for example, to a fear of intimacy” (Illouz 2007:46f.). In short, the therapeutic narrative in a certain sense creates the suffering it is intended to cure. In a similar manner, Zygmunt Bauman (2003) stresses that the freedom Giddens ascribes to contemporary love relationships has nothing to do with moral responsibility for the other, that is, being there for the other no matter what. Instead, love has become incorporated in the logic of the market with devastating consequences for the sort of trust involved in self-disclosure as a being with needs and desires that one cannot satisfy on one’s own. In agreement, Illouz (2012) posits that love hurts because it has become something we choose, just like any other commodity, in an abundant marketplace. Love is no longer one, but infinitely many. According to Byung Chul Han (2012), the crisis of love is not caused by the great supply of possible love partners or others, however.

It is worse than that. The other is threatened with erosion, which also is one of the main reasons why we, to a greater extent, suffer from depression, in contemporary culture, he argues.

Against the backdrop of these arguments, this article explores the disappearance of the other in contemporary love relationships by focusing on the relationship between love and depression. The aim of the article is twofold: first, to provide a theoretical framework to be able to grasp in what ways the other is threatened with erosion in contemporary love relationships and why this may cause depression; second, to exemplify it with empirical data. The first section, excluding this introduction, consists of methodological reflections. The second section introduces Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s thinking on love and discusses the perception of it by thinkers such as Axel Honneth, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as its parallels with Giddens’s ideas on confluent love. The third section is mainly devoted to Julia Kristeva’s theory of the melancholic-depressive composite, but also introduces Illouz’s concept of autotelic desire. In the fourth section, Han’s idea of “the erosion of difference” and Bauman’s thinking on “the broken structure of desire” are discussed in relation to, among other things, the use of Tinder in contemporary culture. The fifth section consists of an analysis of excerpts from contemporary love novels and interviews that illustrate the disappearance of the other in contemporary love relationships. In the sixth section, a number of longer passages from a messenger conversation, ranging over a couple of months in duration, is reproduced and interpreted, mainly by help of Kristeva’s thinking, in order to make visible

the relation between the erosion of other and melancholic depression. The article ends with a short conclusion of the results.

Methodological Reflections

In my research project on what I call depressive love, of which this article only captures a small part, I explore the prominent position given to love and depression in contemporary culture's emotional script, that is, different kinds of cultural agreements concerning what emotions we are supposed to feel, and how we are supposed to express them.¹ Who has not heard of those two, in many ways, opposite moods? Many even use their experiences of love and depression to judge their state of well-being, mental health, and quality of life. Simply put, it is hard to understand oneself on a personal level without thinking in terms of love and depression. One could even say that we are surrounded, and permeated, by ideas on its meaning and significance.

More specifically, my exploration of contemporary emotional life is driven by a set of surprising observations I have made over a few years; namely, that stories about love in science, literature, art, and everyday life conversations relatively often are linked to depression. In some cases, love is depicted in a manner that makes it possible to speak of love with depression or depressive love, which made the following questions come in view: What is depressive love? Has depressive love existed during other times? How is depressive love staged in contempo-

¹ For an elaboration of the concept of emotional script see, for example, Arlie Russell Hochschild's book *The Managed Heart. The Commercialization of Feelings* (1983).

rary culture? What are the purposes of depressive love in contemporary culture? In the last question, the problem appears at its peak. Could it be that depressive love is an effect of changes in societal structures, an unforeseen consequence of the current ideal of love or other competing ideals, which affects the individual in a negative way? There is urgency in answering these questions as a part of a comprehensive diagnosis of the general state of contemporary culture. Ultimately, the aim is to give the actual observation—depressive love, that is, intimate relationships that causes depression and thus could be seen as a distorted form of love—more precise content. It is the latter that this article contributes to.

The method used in the research project is characterized by a strive for polyphony, coexistence, and interaction. I borrow the meaning of these concepts from Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's *Poetics* (1984:5), which starts with inquiries into the open and endless changing nature of language. Different beliefs and views on love and depression meet in the shape of conversation and quarrel. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky is the creator of a new literary genre: the polyphonic novel. In Dostoevsky's works, Bakhtin (1984:7) writes:

a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type. A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characters, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It processes extraordinary independence in the struc-

ture of the work; it sounds as it were, alongside the author's world and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voice of other characters.

We might as well talk about what since Florian Znaniecki and William I. Thomas have been called human documents, that is, descriptions of individual experiences, which show that individual actions are the result of interpersonal relations and participation in the social life. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918) is based on everything from brochures, daily newspapers, articles, congregation documents, and law documents, to personal letters, and an analysis of a Polish farmer's, Wladyslaw Wisniewski, life story, or autobiography.² Human documents take on all kinds of different shapes; letters and diaries, biographies and life stories, dreams and self-observations, essays and notes, and photos and movies (Plummer 2001). The very diverse nature of perspectives that human documents bring to light become pivotal if we want to understand what it means to be a social being; someone who lives in an ever-changing world, where one constantly has to negotiate the meaning of reality with others. Or, as the philosopher John Dewey (2005:32) puts it, when he discusses the psychologist William James' thinking: "a universe which is not all closed and settled, which is still in some respects indeterminate and in the making...an open universe in which uncertainty, choice, hypotheses, novelties, and possibilities are naturalized." What has been said, written, or caught in a picture is allowed to stand its ground without judgment or assessment; at the

same time, an analysis from a mainly sociological and social psychological perspective is carried out. As you will notice in this article, the human documents have led me to both social philosophical and psychoanalytical theories and lines of reasoning to be able to develop the notion of depressive love or the disappearance of the other in love relationships, which is the subject matter of this article.

The human documents, or stories, that I work with to a great extent derive from people whose paths somehow coincided with mine in my everyday life. In this sense, the research approach has been opportunistic, which implies that one uses one's own life experience and the opportunities that appear in one's everyday life in order to deepen the scope of knowledge.³ In my case, this approach has meant talking about emotional experiences with people that I, as a private person, have happened to meet in different contexts and by different reasons, instead of me, as a researcher, beforehand making a selection of, and an agreement with, people to interview about their emotional lives, focusing on their experiences of love and depression. The approach has also resulted in my informants mainly being upper-middle-class Swedish heterosexual women. There are few who do not have at least a doctoral degree in the Humanities or the Social Sciences. The material is thus limited and generalizations are only possible to do on a theoretical level. I have as far as possible avoided interviews between a researcher and an informant, since there is, in my opinion, something artificial in such a situation. In a way, the traditional qualitative interview parallels the clini-

² For a more elaborate discussion see, for example, Martin Bulmer (1986).

³ For a discussion on different forms of opportunistic research, see Jeffrey W. Riemer (1977).

cal study where the ones you want to gain knowledge of are separated from their natural context and therefore are not going to behave and act as they usually would do. Thus, my work can be seen as ethnographic, in the sense of striving to study how people spontaneously, and without reflecting on it, are talking to each other. What are we talking about when we speak of love and depression with others? What does it sound like when the lover talks to the beloved? How is meaning created in these conversations?

To grasp how we talk about love in everyday life, and to identify the factors that are causing our conversations about love to slip into conversations about depression, I have to a great extent worked with human documents such as e-mail, sms-, and messenger-correspondence. These are all human documents typical of contemporary culture which people I got to know along the way shared with me. I also use other forms of human documents to be able to further clarify the displacement of love, love with depression, and depressive love, and to be able to bring a depth to the analysis, and, in certain cases, another meaning to the displacement than the one my "informants" are aware of. Those other forms of human documents, stemming from literature, art, and science, are stories and images of love and depression that constitute parts of the emotional script.⁴ There is, of course, an ethical dilemma with the approach. How can the people I met along the way, and got to know, defend themselves from my interpretations of them or from my analysis of their

stories? They cannot. The interpretations and the analysis are mine and are often carried out by seeking support in established scientific theories of love or depression, which I also perceive of as being stories and thereby equal with what is being interpreted or analyzed. On the other hand, everyone has given their consent of me using their conversations about love in my research and presenting parts of it in this context. A possibility to comment on the completed text has also been given to them. Surprisingly, most of them have declined to do so; not wanting to read my analysis of their stories, nor wanting to find out the context in which I have embedded them. One of the persons I had a conversation with says: "It feels too bad right now, maybe later, when I have more distance." To minimize the violence that interpretations and analysis of statements made by others may bring about, due to the fact that the other always is radically different from oneself, I have given their statements and stories ample space, allowing them to spread out over the pages in a raw and original version. I have made some linguistic improvements to make the text more reader-friendly, though. I have also allowed these stories, and similar stories stemming from the work of other sociologists, art, literature, or poetry, to guide my choice of theoretical tools; that is, the scientific theories I use to interpret and analyze. In this way, one could say that I have worked inductively, which means that I have drawn my conclusions on the basis of the conversations on love and depression I have gathered over time. But, this is not entirely true. Rather, I have worked abductively; I have drawn my conclusions on the basis of rewrites and reinterpretations of stories, seeking guidance in other stories. I have, in a way, even worked retroductively, meaning that

⁴ I have simply collected stories about love and depression from science, art, and everyday life that I naturally have access to and can relate to without too much effort.

I have identified factors that have to be present for something to even be perceived as love with depression or depressive love.⁵ Finally, I have made certain that I am being “true” to all of the stories I use, even if I do not make any claims on there ever being an absolute truth in this context. On the other hand, there is a kind of scientific and biographical honesty that I have safeguarded. Throughout the text, the reader will be able to distinguish the different stories from one another, and to detect my interpretations, analysis, and conclusions. This is important from an ethical standpoint, even though I am aspiring to polyphony.

The empirical material that appears in this article was collected during 2010-2015. Excerpts from three interviews or face-to-face conversations, one sms-conversation, and several messenger-conversations are used in this article, altogether including seven different informants. Six of these informants are Swedish, well-educated women in their thirties and forties. One of these informants is a Swedish, well-educated man in his sixties.

Love: A Definition

In this article, I define love as a relationship in which there exists a mutual recognition of one another as social beings with concrete needs and desires. Love is that which remains when one expresses those needs and desires that one cannot satisfy on one's own in a manner that makes the other satisfy them.

⁵ For an overview of different inferences such as induction, abduction, and retrodution see, for example, Berth Danermark and colleagues (2002, Chapter 5). For an in-depth discussion see, for example, Mikael Carleheden (2014).

When another human being, by free will, satisfies the needs and desires we cannot satisfy ourselves they do not just take care of us, “hold us,” they also express their love. In the mutual, emotional affirmation that love demands, the involved parties are united through their very needs and desires. According to Hegel (1991:§ 158, Addition), it is through this sort of communicative act that we acquire a personal identity and adopt a positive relationship to ourselves:

Love means in general the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not isolated on my own, but gain my self-consciousness only through the renunciation of my independent existence and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me...The first moment in love is that I do not wish to be an independent person in my own right...The second moment is that I find myself in another person.

Each individual must create the other, and the self, in an instance of mutual co-recognition. In this sense, “the needy and desire-bound aspect of love is reconciled with its opposite, the free and self-giving aspect of love,” as Alison R. Bjerke (2011:90) puts it. It can thus be said that love tries to transcend the differences between two unique beings with needs and desires, but is dependent on there being a difference to stimulate the drive for unity. If these needs and desires are neglected, the subject feels violated as an individual with a concrete personal identity and the positive relationship to oneself is threatened. Under ideal circumstances such violations can lead to what Honneth (1995) calls a struggle for recognition. Who are you? Who am I? Which needs do we

need to fulfill for each other in order to express our love? To exemplify, let me reproduce a passage from an sms-correspondence between Amanda, a forty-year-old Swedish woman with a position as a senior lecturer at a university, and Gustaf, a sixty-year-old Swedish man who runs his own business in the health sector:

AMANDA: Okay, then I know your position. Your view of women is unacceptable to me. That's how it is. Despite my valiant and persistent efforts. You have nothing left to give. I think you could afford some honesty, to give us something of worth. I've had so many hopes tied to us and would truly like if my memory wasn't just unpleasant. I want us to be a beautiful love story. For you to be the man I always wanted. At least give me that. Call! I love you.

GUSTAF: We're not getting through to each other. You no longer possess a language. Our problem isn't about a view of women, or issues tied to equality between men and women. But, it is about us not having seen each other, not trusting each other, not been caring for each other, and lost our language, which was the foundation of our love. And you don't love me. On the other hand, I think you love your child.

AMANDA: You've also lost your linguistic magic. And you don't even want to meet me to restore it. You know nothing of my ability to love. Nothing. Unfortunately.

GUSTAF: It's the same disgusting hatred as the last time. I can't reach you and you can't reach me. Once we did. It was fantastic.

AMANDA: You know, I thought you knew me and I thought you could be there. For me. You're right. All I have is my scraps with fragments of love. No. I don't hate you. I'm deeply hurt and sincerely sorry.

GUSTAF: We have to live with our loneliness. We can manage.

AMANDA: No. It would've been so much better if you spoke truthfully and just admitted that you don't have any energy left to try to restore us and love me. Your talk about loneliness is just a façade. Words. You don't take a single loving initiative. It's okay. I'm not going to die. Even if that would've been flattering to you. Go now and I'll find my way to love elsewhere.

GUSTAF: Go ahead.

AMANDA: ...We can no longer talk. The words are dirty. Despite that I reached out my loving hand. But, you didn't hold it. That's the truth.

GUSTAF: No.

AMANDA: Yes. I wrote that I loved you. I called you the minute I got home. I waited for you to take the initiative. I wished fervently for you to do that. But, you couldn't even pick up the phone and answer or call me back. And that's how it goes. Over and over again. Don't you miss me? Don't you want anything? You're going to live like you do right now? Is that how you want it? Really?

GUSTAF: We both need to be loved unconditionally. We both prioritize work and we don't make one common decision. Ten minutes ago you were going to start loving X again. What do you think about how all of this sounds to us?

AMANDA: You thought it was a good idea. How do you think it sounds? I've said that I love you. You don't even want to call. What do you expect?

Despite the signs of anger, hesitation, and resignation, the conversation may be interpreted as an attempt from both parties to express who they are and what they need. How can two people, despite their differences and shortcomings, reach that

point of understanding each other? It is true that love creates and sustains differences, since the other is an individual with a concrete personal identity and as such defined by its difference from the self. However, love also sublates difference. If the self and the other at a certain point in time reciprocally decide to listen to each other's expressions as needing and desiring beings and act upon these needs and desires by freely surrendering themselves to each other, they would receive themselves back again. According to Hegel, love includes a moment of freely surrendering oneself and thus receiving oneself back again. "This is the moment of ethical commitment in which lovers release each other to be free individuals by committing to love one another regardless of the contingency and changeability of their desires. Insofar as the surrender is mutual, each lover's self-giving satisfies the other's desire, and love attains its ethical dimension and its rational form," Bjerke (2011:82) argues. Or, as Hegel (1988:418) puts it in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

For love is a distinguishing of two, who nevertheless are absolutely not distinguished for each other. The consciousness or feeling of the identity of the two—to be outside of myself and in the other—this is love. I have my self-consciousness not in myself, but in the other. I am satisfied and have peace with myself only in this other—and I *am* only because I have peace with myself; if I did not have it, then I would be a contradiction that falls to pieces.

According to Hegel (1991), the communicative act that ideally takes the form of love is necessary to gain actual freedom. It is first when the subject

makes oneself into an object by committing oneself to particular projects in the world that the pure and undifferentiated free will transforms into actual freedom. Put differently, abstract personal identity materializes in the form of concrete personal identity. With parallels to Hegel, Honneth (1995) speaks of love as the kind of recognition that guarantees the subject both physical and emotional integrity, which is crucial for the development of self-confidence. In some cases, however, the misrecognition of the subject as a unique being with concrete needs and desires leads to a mutilated self. The possibility to develop and realize one's personal identity is thwarted. The person in question is thus denied actual freedom and a positive relationship to oneself. Charles Baudelaire (1982:16 [translation—EE]) describes it thus:

As a result, the project of love is fraught with conflict. When it is impossible for two persons to meet as free subjects acting in the world we could go so far as to speak of the victim and its executioner: "Two lovers may be never so enamored of each other, never so satisfied with desire; one of the two will always be cooler and less obsessed than the other. One is then the operator or the executioner, the other the surgical object or the victim."

It could thus be said that there are only two ways to exist in relation to the other. Either you make the other into a passive object to be viewed and understood, or the self will become dependent on the other for its meaning: in other words, either sadism or masochism. We can recognize the perspective in the following lines from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (2001:227):

Everything which may be said of me in my relations with the Other applies to him as well. While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me...I am possessed by the Other; the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it... makes me and thereby he possesses me, and this possession is nothing other than the consciousness of possessing me.

From this perspective, to recognize the other as a subject and the self as an object will be a failed project, which for Sartre results in a dialectic of sadism and masochism. The idea of love as an intersubjective experience will, on Baudelaire and Sartre's reasoning, be an irrational argument. However, according to Beauvoir, Sartre's view on love as a phenomenon constituted by sadomasochistic power games risks being intoxicating to the extent that the lovers lose sight of themselves completely (Cleary 2017). The view parallels Hegel and Honneth's thinking. Love is to overcome sadomasochistic power games and form a union, mainly by expressing one's needs and desires, in a way that makes the other understand and freely act upon them, and vice versa. Nevertheless, Beauvoir's account of love is more sensitive to the power dimensions involved in relation to sex and gender. "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman," she argues in *The Second Sex* (2009:283), stressing that although sex is a biological given, gender is a social and cultural given. Not until recently have women questioned their subordination as the second sex, that is, inessential beings who acquire their personal

identity only in relation to men, hence are reduced to objects of the male gaze (Beauvoir 2009; Cleary 2017). Women have thus been unable to answer the question of who they are independent of men. As a woman, one tends to view oneself as part of man, merging with his personal identity, and in the name of love come to abandon and disavow oneself. "She abandons herself first to love to save herself; but the paradox of idolatrous love is that in order to save herself, she ends up totally disavowing herself," Beauvoir (2009:691) writes. This dilemma is possible to overcome, though. If love between man and woman is founded on mutual recognition of each other's freedom as needing and desiring beings, they will be able to see themselves in themselves, as well as in each other, and both reveal values and ends in the world (Beauvoir 2009). The solution echoes in Anthony Giddens's theory of the transformation of intimacy in which he argues that the democratization of the public sphere is structurally correspondent with the democratization of the private sphere. Whereas political democracy concerns free and equal relations between individuals and "the constitutional limitation of (distributive) power" (Giddens 1992:186) in the public sphere, intimacy concerns "emotional communication, with others and with the self, in a context of interpersonal equality" (Giddens 1992:130), in the private sphere. According to Giddens (1992:189f.), the foundation of all forms of democratized relationships is "respect for the independent views and personal traits of the other."

As indicated in the introduction, many sociologists disagree with Giddens's view on contemporary culture as a time and place that encourage

and nourish democratic relationships within the private sphere or what Hegel understands as an intersubjective experience in the form of mutual surrender in which the lover's self-giving satisfies the other's needs or desires. As I understand it, traits of modern society such as individualization, rationalization, and commodification have, despite the increasing material welfare and equality among men and women, lead to a tendency to neglect the struggle for recognition as a concrete being with needs and desires in intimate relationships, thus—to an inability to establish an intersubjective relationship. In earlier texts, I have discussed this in terms of the reduction of the self to an object, in the form of self-silencing, and the reduction of the other to an object in the form of self-communication (Engdahl 2017; 2018). Nevertheless, I have concluded that it is better to talk about the latter as other-silencing. Self-silencing as it comes to expression in, for example, depressed women's narratives, is the most obvious misunderstanding of love, and parallels Beauvoir's understanding of female subjectivity as something that tends to get lost in the male gaze. Women simply avoid giving voice to their own needs and desires, in advantage to fulfilling the needs and desires of men (Crowley 1991; Engdahl 2017; 2018). Other-silencing that has been facilitated not least by the last decade's technological development is a more contemporary example of the distortion of love. Nevertheless, it has the same consequences as self-silencing in that it does not enable recognition of oneself as a being with needs and desires or actual freedom and the development and realization of a concrete personal identity. In a worst-case scenario, it ends up with depression.

The Melancholic and Depressive Composite

It seems like we are prone to build ourselves with layer upon layer of lost love objects. To avoid grief, we internalize the lovelessness of the beloved as a part of ourselves: an internal failure that we constantly return to in the form of self-hatred. In this state, which is actually a form of narcissism, it becomes difficult to handle loneliness. Hatred and aggression are hidden and there is a refusal to see oneself as separate from the object of love which one was completely dependent on at birth—the mother. One does not realize that all the hate and all the aggression within oneself cannot destroy the beloved object. The beloved is a free subject that alone can satisfy the needs one cannot handle on one's own. To ignore this separation is to transform the love and indestructible desire for the other into melancholy and depression (cf. Freud 1917). An example of this dynamic is found in Julia Kristeva (1989:11): "I love him, but I hate him more, because I love him and do not want to lose him, I place him in me, but because I hate him, the other inside me hurts me, I'm bad, I'm not worth anything, I'll kill myself."

In *Soleil Noir: dépression et mélancolie (Black Sun: Depression and Melancholy)*, first published in 1987, Kristeva views melancholic depression as an expression of a fragile self that is fused with the other: originally the mother. But, what are the foundations that lay the ground for the inability to mourn a lost love object, for example, the mother: weak parenting, biological sensitivity? That question is Kristeva's and she argues that the sphere of melancholic depression is a shadowland between the biologi-

cal and symbolic. Thus, she does not separate one from the other. Melancholy and depression are intertwined since there are no clear borders between what in psychiatry has been called melancholy and the type of illness, which only responds through administration of chemical therapy, Kristeva (1989) argues. Instead of separating different types of depression and determining the effect of different antidepressants or mood-stabilizing drugs on their symptoms, Kristeva (1989) adopts a Freudian perspective. She explores the melancholic-depressive composite by taking object loss and the linguistic modification of signifying bonds as her starting point. Accordingly, the inability to linguistically modify signifying bonds distinguishes the melancholic depressive person. The person who suffers from melancholic depression is not able to put into words their experience of shortage or despair, the needs and desires that they cannot satisfy themselves in a meaningful way. Naming is not experienced as a reward for the melancholic depressive person, but as a punishment, which in many cases is anxiety provoking. Thus, the thought process deteriorates; it becomes slow and sluggish, just as the psychomotor activity does. Alternatively, the thought process and one's associative abilities are accelerating in an uncontrolled manner. Regardless, the intolerance of object loss and the inability to find consolation or compensation in language use distinguishes the melancholic depressive person. The accusations of oneself, which depressed people often express, are within psychoanalysis often perceived as being an accusation towards the other. It could thus be said that the melancholic depressive state houses an ambivalence. A confusion between the other and the self is taking place. Karl Abraham

(1994) and Sigmund Freud (1917) talk about the desire to swallow the other or to fill one's holes with what one lacks, as a strategy that depressed persons use to be better able to live with the other that they cannot tolerate. Chopped into pieces, chewed and spat upon; everything is better than an absolute loss of the love object.

According to classic psychoanalytical theory, we could further understand the aggression directed towards the other as an extension of an unexpected sexual desire: a displacement of the real loss that is manifested in the anxiety of losing the other by surviving oneself. However, the subject is not yet separated from the object of love, since the object of love is kept alive by being incorporated in the self. It is this type of melancholic depressive person Kristeva (1989) describes as suicidal, meaning they wish to disappear, since the other, which is being housed within them, is evil but at the same time a part of their individual personality. In more modern psychoanalytical treatment, it has been noted that depressed people do not always consider themselves to be wronged or offended, but instead experience that something is seriously wrong with them. It has thus been suggested that the composite of melancholy and depression is the most archaic form, or expression, of the non-symbolic unnamable narcissistic wound, which is so valuable to the melancholic depressive person that no one on the outside can be used as a reference point. The depressed mood is and remains the only substitute that the melancholic depressive person can relate to and it is being nourished and kept alive in the absence of any other substitute. The thought of suicide is, in such a case, not a disguised act, a tragic and ill-concealed wish

to kill the other, but a fusion between the depressed mood and the despair felt by the melancholic depressive person, and it goes beyond the impossible love, which is always to be found somewhere else. The depressed is not, in this case, mourning an object, but the thing. The real is not given any meaning at all, because it has been separated from the object of love and desire. According to Kristeva (1989), this is precisely what the poet de Nerval is trying to grasp when he speaks of an event with no presence; a light with no representation. The Thing is the imagined sun; simultaneously shining and black. I imagine the black sun as a sharp and penetrating light that is recurring in so many near-death experiences. You are not dreaming of the sun, but of an even stronger light. As I understand psychoanalytical theory, the problem seems to be that no erotic object can replace what was originally lost, which for the person in question leads to one disappointing love following another. Alternatively, the depressed will fall back into solitude with the unmentionable thing, which can only be recognized in experiences of discouragement and despair: the substitute of the thing. Kristeva (1989) parallels the melancholic depressive person with an atheist robbed of all meaning. At the same time, she is also a mystic, since she stays wounded and captive by, and in, her own affections. The affective is therefore the depressive's business. Without any trust in the healing powers of language, the melancholic depressive person cannot physically unite with the other (over time), nor can she psychologically process its loss.

The affective also seems to be an aspect of what Illouz (2012) calls autotelic desire, which is a hyper-autonomous form of desire that aims at itself.

One of her male informants describes it thus:

I hate one-night stands. It feels empty. I need the whole package that enables me to fantasize...Without love I have no inspiration in my work: it is my drug. I cannot be alone. I mean I cannot be alone in my head. Not alone physically. I have no interest whatsoever in intimacy between four walls. I am done with the whole business of domesticity. But, not with fantasy. [Illouz 2012:233f.]

Autotelic desire is the pleasure that emanates "from the e-mails we sent to each other from home, each of our spouses not knowing, and it was all the sweet agony of waiting to see him, to fantasize about him endlessly at night, and when waking up, and at work. Being in this situation where you can't talk to each other, and see each other when you want, really makes you long for him" (Illouz 2012:134). The autotelic desire consists of dreams and images of the object of love and is common in relationships where the loved one is absent. According to Illouz, this hyper-autonomous form of desire emanates as a result of the difficulties we have today when it comes to letting our imagination and desire fuse with reality. Further Illouz (2012) argues that the autotelic desire is an aesthetic, rather than a moral, experience.

The Erosion of Difference or the Broken Structure of Desire

In his book *The Agony of Eros* (2017) Byung Chul Han argues that contemporary culture threatens to undo the possibility of democratic relationships in the private sphere by the erosion of the other's difference in favor of personal achievements. In his

view, many indicate that we live in the first epoch of time where not only children, but also adults, tend to believe that all they need and desire is possible to achieve by their own performance. Such a mindset kills everything that takes the other, who is characterized by its difference from the self, as a starting point. Han exemplifies that with the help of the bestselling novel trilogy *Fifty Shades*. The heroine of the novel at the beginning acts surprised over the fact that Mr. Grey sees their relationship as a business deal. A contract that regulates their intimacy is signed. The heroine is supposed to “keep herself clean and shaved and/or waxed at all times” (Han 2017:14). Everything that might be perceived as dirt must disappear, as if the characters in the novel were extremely aware of the potential disgusting features of the others’ naked bodies. The S&M games that are carried out are all controlled by rules agreed upon in advance. No real transcendental experience occurs. Nothing unlikely is made possible. At most, “sweet torture” is achieved. Eros is being perverted as it becomes a formula for pleasure or consumption, which can only be understood in terms of performance. It encourages a quantitative approach to love. One simply starts counting how many partners one had sex with, and, all of a sudden, just by performing a simple addition, one has calculated one’s fuckability.

The infinite number of possible partners on the open sex and love market creates a kind of decision anxiety that makes it impossible for the self to give complete attention to the other, which is what it takes to make, and keep, the other as an absolute desire. Both the past and the future are threatened by the tyranny of the moment when the sexual act is

unleashed, as anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2001) would have put it.

The line of argumentation can be illustrated by the use of Tinder as it comes to expression in the article “Tinder and the Dawn of the ‘Dating Apocalypse’” by journalist Nancy Jo Sales, published in *Vanity Fair’s* September issue, 2015.⁶ A man in his twenties talks about how hard it is for him to settle down when without any effort he can hook up with a girl and have sex with her within twenty minutes. “It’s just a numbers game. Before, I could go out to a bar and talk to one girl, but now I can sit home on Tinder and talk to 15 girls,” a second one says. “I’ve gotten numbers on Tinder just by sending emojis,” says a third one. “Without actually having a conversation—having a conversation via emojis,” he continues. But, that is not the kind of woman you marry, they all agree. It is more about immediate satisfaction, according to the men from the article, who are all in their twenties and live somewhere in the New York metropolitan area. “It’s instant gratification,” a Brooklyn-based photographer says, “a validation of your own attractiveness by just, like, swiping your thumb on an app. You see some pretty girl and you swipe and it’s, like, oh, she thinks you’re attractive too, so it’s really addicting, and you just find yourself mindlessly doing it.” The young women from the article agree: “It’s, like, fun to get the messages.” “If someone ‘likes’ you, they think you’re attractive.” “It’s a confidence booster.”

It is easy. But, it is not about love. At least not in the Hegelian sense that I have introduced. No needs or

⁶ See: <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/08/tinder-hook-up-culture-end-of-dating>. Retrieved January 04, 2020.

desires are expressed, hence, not acted upon. “We don’t know what the girls are like,” says one of the young men from Sales’ article. “And they don’t know us,” says another. To get emotionally involved with the other is seen as an obstacle that needs to be overcome by the young women from Sales’ article. “It’s a contest to see who cares less, and guys win a lot at caring less,” says one. Another says:

It’s not like just blind fucking for pleasure and it’s done; some people actually like the other person. Sometimes you actually catch feelings and that’s what sucks, because it’s one person thinking one thing and the other person thinking something completely different and someone gets their feelings hurt. It could be the boy or the girl.

The above quote points out an unwillingness to transcend the differences between the self and the other, which results in an inability to gain actual freedom. A researcher, who is being consulted for Sales’ article, states that the use of Tinder is showing the same patterns as the consumption of porn. The increased availability, made possible by technical developments, has a backlash, psychosexual obesity:

The appetite has always been there, but it had restricted availability; with new technologies the restrictions are being stripped away and we see people sort of going crazy with it. I think the same thing is happening with this unlimited access to sex partners. People are gorging. That’s why it’s not intimate. You could call it a kind of psychosexual obesity.

As Bauman (2003) has come to understand it, sex has been included in a sort of mall shopping men-

tality. Shopping for sex does not even need to include having sex. “It’s a recreational activity. It’s entertainment,” as journalist Louise France put it in “Love at first site,” *Observer Magazine*, already in 2002.⁷ Internet dating or dating app culture does not necessarily mean that we have more sex. Some statistical data point in another direction. “Number of sexual partners increased steadily between the G.I.s and 1960s-born GenXers and then dipped among Millennials to return to Boomer levels,” psychologist Jean Twenge (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2015:2273) concludes on the basis of her and her co-authors’ analysis of changes in American adults’ sexual behavior and attitudes, based on the General Social Survey, an almost annual, nationally representative survey that has been administered between 1972 and 2012, including data from 11 million respondents. However, internet dating and the industry of dating apps would not flourish if it were not aided by “the removal of full-time engagement, commitment and the obligation ‘of being there for you whenever you need me’ from the list of necessary conditions of partnership” (Bauman 2003:66). None of the women or men from the article speaks of the abomination that they perceive as being an emotional involvement with the other. The ability to move on without feeling remorse and anguish—to leave the other behind—seems to be an ability one must practice and master pretty well to make it in the current free relationship market. To fall crazily in love is not on the agenda for any of those sparkling people. Infatuation and love are not even being mentioned. It cannot be found on Tinder, as far as they are concerned.

⁷ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2002/jun/30/features.magazine187>. Retrieved January 04, 2020.

While Han speaks of how eroticism has vanished, Bauman (1998) discusses “the postmodern erotic revolution.” The result of this revolution is an erotic, or a broken, structure of desire, which is disconnected from three crucial aspects: (a) sex in the sense of biology and reproduction; (b) love in its insistence of eternity, exclusivity, and loyalty; and (c) the production of immortality and thus art, politics, life strategies, and all other aspects of culture. Only such an unbound version of desire could sail freely under the flag of pleasure-searching. Without being obstructed or guided the wrong way by any other purposes than the purely experience-oriented one, it is free to establish itself and negotiate its own rules as it goes along. But, this freedom cannot be changed nor ignored by desire. The newly gained indeterminacy is certainly a source for intoxicating experiences of freedom, but also of extreme insecurity and anxiety. There are no longer any legitimate solutions to rely on. Everything must be constantly renegotiated and caught on the fly. One could therefore say that we have never been freer than what we are right now. The peculiar thing is that this freedom does not seem to lend itself to self-transcendence, since it is pure and abstract and does not relate to the other as distinguished from the self. In current literary love fiction and everyday life conversations, we increasingly find this pattern illustrated. Among other things, we find it in the shape of love work in the absence of the beloved.

Love Work in Solitude

The author and journalist Lena Andersson’s best-selling and award-winning novel, *Egenmäktigt förfarande: en roman om kärlek* (*Willful Disregard: A Novel*

About Love) from 2013 (English version, 2016), and its standalone sequel *Utän personligt ansvar* (*Without Personal Responsibility*) from 2014, serve as good examples of love work in solitude. In both novels, Andersson paints a picture of a long and partly painful wait for signs and signals from the loved one. There are many calls, without answers. This excludes Eros as being the kind of love depicted in Andersson’s novels. Rather, the lack of erotic is a feature of Andersson’s writings on love. As far as sex appears at all in *Willful Disregard* (2013), it is in the shape of bad sex. Carnal lust is not depicted at all. The most physical activity we get to partake in is a recurring marathon. The lover (Ester Nilsson) goes alone for a run. This physical activity becomes a recurring topic of conversation between Ester and the object of her love (Hugo Rask):

He asked if she had been running a lot during the weekend and she answered that she had run forty kilometers since they met. The running was still like half a transmission between them, both the premise and the barrier for their intimacy. It’s a full Marathon! he called. But, spread out over three different runs, she said. Why did she call today? Because she was hoping to get an answer to the considerations he promised her he’d make? Not really. That wasn’t realistic. She called because the itching was back, the feverish itching of love, which forever lies dormant in one’s cell system and could break out at any point. [Andersson 2013:149 (translation—EE)]

What kind of intimacy is Ester and Hugo engaging in? Most of the novel depicts Ester’s thoughts, dreams, or even her fantasies about Hugo. Is it not a fact that Hugo actually loves Ester, or at least that

he should love her? Peculiarly, Hugo is not the one that Ester turns to when searching for answers to her questions. Instead, she turns to her own reason. Ester's obsession is not revolving around what Hugo really feels or thinks, but revolves around what Ester, after reasonable consideration, thinks that Hugo should feel and think. The novel is mainly a description of Ester's inner conversation with herself.

In Andersson's second novel, this inclination reveals itself instantly, among other things, when Ester's new object of love, Olof Sten, at the beginning stage of their relationship declares that there is no chance he will ever leave his wife. Ester "thought that this was exactly what married people would say when they met someone who swept them off their feet and shook up their world. When people wanted something that much, it happened that they stated the opposite" (Andersson 2014:23 [translation—EE]). Ester is not taking Olof literally. Nor is she taking into account her friend's voice—telling her to listen to what he is actually saying:

Ester had a friend called Lotta. She often stressed her opinions. "Take people literally, that's the most practical and simple. Don't interpret, assume that they mean what they say." Lotta was wise and careful. Ester's opinion was that nothing good could come out of being wise and careful, and taking people literally when it comes to nascent love relationships, since language in this particular case was used to fool oneself, get rid of difficult decisions, and avoid love. People feared love, so she had read in the writings of the great poets, since it carried the seed of the greatest pleasures and therefore also to the most painful losses. [Andersson 2014:24 (translation—EE)]

Through this line of reasoning the other turns into a shadow figure, in a sense that relates to Han's idea of the erosion of the other. The understanding of love that develops is thus far from Hegel, Beauvoir, and Giddens's understanding of love as a form of communicative democracy in the private sphere, in which the lovers in respect for each other's personal identity are united by responding to each other's needs and desires. To the extent it is about intimacy it seems to be more of a question of Sartre's idea of sadomasochistic power games. But, Ester sees herself neither as the operator nor as the executioner, in Baudelaire's corresponding narrative of intimacy. Ester is a woman who does whatever she wants to do on her own terms; kind of like an anti-heroine and what seems to be a new female ideal in contemporary culture. Instead of engaging in sadomasochistic power-games, I suggest that Ester is silencing the other by devoting herself to autotelic desire because of her inability to let her imagination and desire fuse with reality. Although she sees herself as rational, the affective seems to be her business. Or, perhaps she is just playing the game inside her own head, which could be understood as a defense mechanism. I will come back to the idea at hand later in the article.

Sara, a Swedish PhD student in her thirties, not only makes the affective her business, but also embodies autotelic desire as an aesthetic experience:

SARA: During almost ten or fifteen years I thought he was the most beautiful creature on earth. His face was perfect. His skin spotless. His style...He was cool. I could see the two of us in front of me when I closed my eyes: pure beauty. People always noticed us when we were together.

ME: Did you love him?

SARA: Love? Of course I loved him. My whole desire was directed towards him. He was always present. For many years I was living in his shadow. He was my invisible companion...When I was in therapy for my insomnia, he was the only thing I talked about. Besides crying and insisting that the only reason I was in therapy was because of my insomnia...We hit a point when my therapist suggested that he was a break.

ME: A break?

SARA: Yes. Break was the word she used. I think she meant that he was my escape from reality, the boredom of everyday life. I remember thinking she was brilliant coming up with that idea. I used to tell that to myself—he is a pause—kind of like a mini-vacation. But, the truth is, he was always present.

If we continue to listen to Sara it becomes obvious that the line is thin between pleasure of autotelic desire and what Han understands as the agony of love:

ME: In what way was he always present?

SARA: I'm not sure...I talked to him almost all the time.

ME: Talked?

SARA: Sent letters, e-mail, SMS...and in between I felt his presence...As I said: he was my invisible companion. I lived in his shadow.

ME: In his shadow?

SARA: Like, it didn't matter what I did or who I met... He was always there. And I wanted it. For him to be with me. He lived within me and I was waiting for a sign, a signal—a message, anything. Oh my God, I suffered if I didn't get it. Sometimes I've viewed it as self-injury. One of my best girlfriends actually told me that I might as well be injecting heroin. I guess it was then I started to think about it like that.

In summary, the agony of love is not always equivalent to depression, but it usually touches on misrecognition as a being with needs and loss of meaning and social reality or actual freedom. Julia, a Swedish female senior lecturer in her forties, has experienced such loss and describes it thusly:

Not only did he not answer my messages, he blocked me from all his social media activities. He kind of erased me from his life, as if I'd never existed. The whole situation felt unreal. I felt unreal. At the same time...I had thousands of messages from him in my computer, on my cell phone. I mean, he had sent thousands... even an unpublished poem that he was working on, like, two hundred pages to read while I was trying on shoes. He was funny. He made me laugh. Anyway, was I supposed to ignore ever having met him, exchanged messages twenty days in a row? Didn't these messages exist? Of course they did, but there was no reality behind them. The words were the reality. I couldn't or didn't want to realize it. I'm not stupid. I just couldn't believe that something that meant everything to me—then and there—meant so little to him. I became Alice. "Who the fuck is Alice?" Alice in Wonderland. I fell down the rabbit hole.

It may seem like we have ended up far from Anderson's novel character—Ester. But, in fact, Ester is also thinking that "what was life-changing for her was pastime to Hugo":

For short periods of time she considered this thought. Then she dismissed it to be able to endure. In April, she wrote two long letters she sent by mail. She wanted to explain herself. She wanted to formulate what she had felt, and why she had acted and believed the

way she did, saying that his actions had shaped hers, that no one acts without reacting too; he had given her good reason to make her assumptions. She did not expect a response and did not receive one either.

[Andersson 2013:33 (translation—EE)]

From Autotelic Desire to Melancholic Depression

To elaborate my argument and show not only the thin line between autotelic desire and the agony of love, but also how other-silencing may cause depression, let me end with an analysis of a number of longer passages from a messenger conversation, ranging over a couple of months in duration, between Clara and Ann, two Swedish women in their thirties:

CLARA: I went to Zack [an American man in his forties that Clara met on Tinder], we had amazing sex, which we always have. He tells me in bed that he will go back to San Diego this Sunday for a new job that was way too good to turn down; two months with a good salary and a free car and accommodation. Since he is a freelance musician, he couldn't get that type of job in New York during those months.

ANN: Hm... That was still kind of fine. He has to work.

CLARA: Yes, but now he is here [in New York] for a few days and is working on a musical and is so stressed about it, and everything with the jet lag and stuff, so he has difficulties sleeping and didn't want me to sleep with him. He really is stressed out and neurotic and sensitive, but that's also why I like him.

ANN: Yeah, but consider yourself too. Does he at all have time for you in his life? And what space do you give yourself in your life? It seems to be all about him.

CLARA: He said he wanted to meet this Friday and we said that I could visit him in San Diego in August, because I can, I'm going to California anyway and haven't decided when I'm going. But, I haven't heard from him since I left him on Tuesday, and I think he simply dumped me in his own way...and that's probably how it is then...

ANN: Yes, then that's how it is.

CLARA: I'm really sorry about it...and that I could have those strong feelings for him for a long time without him feeling the same...that I can fool myself this way.

ANN: But, Clara, I don't think you love him. Not with the way he treats you. He's only hurting you. You must watch out for yourself.

CLARA: I don't know how to watch out for myself, it's as simple as that. And I should really only focus on how I feel in that, and, as you say, what space do I occupy in my own life and in his, if I want it that way. But, he has been truly passionate with me and for me.

ANN: Okay, but let that go for a while and focus on everything else in your life except just him. For real. It's important.

CLARA: We've been in touch pretty much every day since January [for six months]...

ANN: Yes, and you can continue to stay in touch. But, what does your connection look like? What do you talk about?

CLARA: I have never felt this way for any other but him, that's how it is. Not even for Viktor [a Swedish man in his late forties that Clara earlier had a longer relationship with, but left him because she found out he was cheating on her, or at least suspected he was]. There is an attraction and electricity between us that I've never experienced before. My body is totally addicted to him.

ANN: Is that so? That's bad.

CLARA: I know...but, as I said... I just have to get that it is over and also take care of myself and my needs, I know that...but he is just totally my type... complicated, neurotic, hypersensitive, super bright, super creative, super talented, self-absorbed, egocentric and I'm going to fall apart if he doesn't contact me again, or doesn't want to see me on Friday or have me come to him in August...

ANN: Narcissist, how sad.

CLARA: Yes, self-absorbed and low self-esteem, maybe not really narcissistic.

ANN: Shit, the same! You can't be thaaaat dependent on a guy no matter what.

CLARA: No, I know, I really must stop that...but he's not a regular man... At the same time Anders [a Swedish man in his forties that Clara earlier had a relatively short and shallow relationship with and who back then didn't want to get any more serious than hooking up when convenient in time and place] is sending pictures of the nice little cottage he's building.

ANN: It is possible that Zack isn't a narcissist. But, why is he so important to you? Try to answer honestly.

CLARA: Because he is just as fine as I have tried to describe him. It is something so special between us and I haven't experienced that before. He reaches places in me and parts of my personality that no one else has even come close to before. Sounds like a cliché, but that's how it is. And I don't want to lose him, but I realize that might happen. Yet, I think he feels the same way about me. Or, at least that's what I have thought because he told me so.

ANN: Well, I think you have to deal with your feeling of abandonment.

CLARA: Yes, I know. And it will never happen. I will probably continue like this for the rest of my life; like getting involved with men who don't want me in a deeper sense because I can't or don't dare to love someone or let myself be loved for real. It's depressing to realize that and to realize that I probably never will have a functioning, healthy relationship with any man. I'm getting suicidal just by thinking about it. I will always be truly alone.

ANN: Maybe. Or, you are working hard to put words to your feelings of abandonment and by doing so objectifying them and distancing yourself from them.

CLARA: I know that Anders wants me in a deeper sense now, but my body doesn't want him anymore...

ANN: Of course, you won't be alone forever, Clara.

CLARA: Yes, that's how it's going to be. Ann, I know it. That was just like another confirmation of that fact. I wish that my body wanted Jules [a colleague in his fifties who lives in New York]. He wants me too, but it [Clara's body] doesn't want it, so it's like not possible. My body just wants Zack.

ANN: Don't listen to your body then. Give it a chance with Anders. Get a life here [in Sweden].

CLARA: That's not possible. If I don't want to have sex, it won't work. And I don't want a life in Sweden. But, it's all so freaked out. I'm such a freak, for real. I must get myself together. I won't text Zack anymore, I've said and done all I can to keep him.

ANN: Good. Then that's a closed chapter.

CLARA: Yes, I know!

ANN: Put a parenthesis around all men for a while. Promise me. Enjoy your wonderful life instead.

CLARA: Yes... I should...but I don't have a wonderful life... If Zach doesn't get in touch with me again, I will fall apart for real and not want anything more to do about love. I'm too broken to love.

Already at the beginning of the conversation between Clara and Ann we can see the contours of Clara's unwillingness, or even inability, to accept a break with Zack. At the same time, she fears that this is exactly what will happen. Maybe it has happened already? Zack has probably left her behind. Moved on as if nothing happened. Clara cannot handle that thought. It is unbearable. Zack awakens emotions within her that she has never been in touch with before. What Clara fails to see is that she is captured in her own affections, which brings to the surface traces of distant memories of long-lost love objects. She is carrying all of these, a time gone by, as if they were stored in her body. Zack is greater than anything she has ever experienced before when it comes to love: "complicated, neurotic, hypersensitive, super bright, super creative, super talented, self-absorbed, egocentric." But, this combination of personality traits will, according to Clara, destroy her. Does she wish for her own destruction? Is she enjoying the idea, or does it not matter to her anymore, because she thinks she is "too broken to love"? Or, is she simply unable to speak of her experience of shortage or despair in a meaningful way?

The conversation between Clara and Ann continues in a manner that is not distinctively different from earlier. At the same time, Clara's intolerance towards object loss clearly grows stronger:

CLARA: Zack still hasn't contacted me. And I haven't been able to refrain from sending e-mails and sms. I have zero dignity, but he has zero maturity.

ANN: Precisely! Fuck him. You have to.

CLARA: I know. But, I don't get any of it. How did this happen? Why is he treating me like dirt? Why am

I allowing myself to be treated like dirt? There must be an end for this kind of thing on my part. After my e-mail and after my last sms where I ask him to respond to whether he wants to see me tonight and that I understand if he doesn't want to, and in that case I will throw away his number and do my best to forget about him and leave him alone if he just tells me if he wants to end it with me or not, I receive this response: Hey, thanks for writing. I really think the world of you and would love to see more of you, opportunities permitting. I don't want anything serious, though. And it feels like it's getting more serious than I'm up for. As I've said, given the opportunity for us to spend time together—where we live in the same city, for example—that would be one thing. As it stands, the only time we've had in the same city has been burdened by the fact that one of us has just crossed several time zones to make it happen. This does not, in my experience, lend itself to casually getting to know and enjoy one another. I'm totally attracted to you and would love to hang out when we can—naked and otherwise. Unfortunately, tonight is not going to work. As for California, let's discuss a few weeks down the road. OK? Thanks, Z

ANN: Dump him!!!

CLARA: Right? I'm not going to answer and say nothing, right?

ANN: Say thanks, but no, thanks!

CLARA: What is he really saying here?? Why does he say he's attracted to me and wants to hang out? He simply can't take that I'm completely dumping him. He doesn't want to lose my affirmations and he thinks I want to meet him on his terms in California.

ANN: He wants to have sex when the opportunity permits it. I'm sorry to have to say it. But, I'm pretty sure that's exactly how it is. Clara, he is actually pretty honest and types it like it is. What more is there to get?

CLARA: Yes, you're right. That's how it is. I thought it was more, we've had a deeper connection than that. I thought... So, who the HELL does he think he is??? The worst is that I can't stand the thought of not having any more contact with him... I can't stand the thought of completely dumping him.

ANN: Then you must take what you can get and stick with it.

CLARA: But, I'm not getting anything...and what I get is so fucking immature and unfinished and undignified. I must dump him. I know. It's going to take some time, but I have to.

ANN: Yes. Just do it! Please.

CLARA: Or, maybe I'm also just on this maturity level, that thought is frightening to me. What never can become real; just being thought.

ANN: Come on!

CLARA: But, I wanted more with him...

ANN: Make sure you get it then. You are the best and deserve it.

About a month later the conversation still focuses on Zack:

CLARA: Yes, Zack, yes...oh my God...we've been going at it, mostly with our phones, and he's now after many months back in New York for a few months before he's going off for the next gig, and the first thing he does is pick up the relationship with his ex that he said he'd ended...just because she's "conveniently close by"...and if I had only lived there, things would've been different, he says...but like hell it would've. He's immature and way too self-absorbed and sensitive and very, very creative and intelligent. Why, oh why, am I falling for that type...but I'm dead-in love with him. Don't want anyone else, so I'm

making all the mistakes one can make... Tried to date others, but my body only wants him, what the hell is wrong with me?? And Anders...poor thing...has tried to get me back all this time until just recently when he realized it is over and that he, himself, is partly to blame. Now he's unfriended me on Facebook. I actually think he, in a way, was serious about wanting me back "for real" and take his chance on me and, as he said, to live many, many happy years together. He was totally ready to share everything with me and to be a real man and partner. He was even prepared to give me another child, at least he said so... And I actually believe that he's truly unhappy now, for real...but I don't want him, I feel nothing for him anymore and it's so damn nice. And how lucky I was that we didn't end up together when I wanted us to. It would've only ended in misery...

ANN: But, you never want anyone who wants you... that's not good at all...

CLARA: No, I know...but one day I will!! Or, I'll be lonely for the rest of my life. That's something I'm beginning to accept. Although if Z wants me for real one day, then I want to marry him and spend the rest of my life with him... That's just how it is.

ANN: Yeah, that's what you say now...

CLARA: No, somewhere inside me I know that's how it is, and it feels really good. I think it'll be us in the end. Haven't felt such a peculiar and sensible confidence before, despite the mess we're in right now. We have a connection I've never had with anyone else, and when we are together in real life, it's incredibly intense on all levels. And when we're apart, it's like we can't let go of one another, even though we know that that might be the best thing to do right now. Maybe he'll mature... In lack of something better: a soul-mate and the most intense sex I've ever had. I think

he feels the same way. I think he also feels like we are something completely unique together.

ANN: Yes, maybe...

CLARA: Or, he doesn't, and he'll manage to push me away and will end up regretting it for the rest of his life.

ANN: If he feels like you're completely unique, why isn't he taking a chance on you?

CLARA: He's really afraid and wants to be in control. I don't think he's met someone like me before. You know, European with all that comes with that and having a higher education and such... People like you and I don't grow on trees!!! People like us are, like, MUCH of EVERYTHING.

Clara knows very well where Zack is at in the relationship. He has, with all necessity, explained himself on that point. "I don't want anything too serious, though," he bluntly writes. Which is precisely what Clara's friend, Ann, also perceives and confirms. "He wants to have sex when the opportunity permits it. I'm sorry to have to say it. But, I'm pretty sure that's exactly how it is." Yet, Clara is not receptive to what any of them says and seems to honestly mean. Instead, Clara shows both grief and aggression towards Zack, which, according to classic psychoanalytical theory, is a symptom of depression. The depressive state she embodies houses an ambivalence. The accusations of oneself, which melancholic depressive people often express, is also present in the above passages from Clara and Ann's conversation. Whatever Zack is capable of giving is "so fucking immature and unfinished and undignified," Clara writes. A confusion between the other and the self is taking place. Perhaps that is why we here are dealing with "what never can become real; just being thought," as Clara puts it. In the conversation between Clara and

Ann, both idealizations and defamations take place. In one single sentence, Clara manages the feat of both idealizing and defaming Zack. "He's immature and way to self-absorbed and sensitive and very, very creative and intelligent," she writes to Ann. Thereafter she defames herself: "Why, oh why, am I falling for that type...but I'm deadly in love with him. Don't want anyone else, so I'm making all the mistakes one can make... Tried to date others, but my body only wants him, what the hell is wrong with me?" Clara is here separating herself from her body, in terms of explaining why she cannot or does not want to bond with another man, which can be understood as a defense mechanism. It is not only she who consciously wants Zack. It is also her body. It can thus be said that she sees her body as an interactive partner supporting her claims. When Clara, on the other hand, posits that Zack has probably never met someone like her, an idealization of herself takes place, which also includes Ann. "I don't think he's met someone like me before. You know, European with all that comes with that and having a higher education and such... People like you and I don't grow on trees! People like us are, like, MUCH of EVERYTHING." This passage is interesting in itself, since Clara verbalizes two orders—that of reason and emotion—as complementary in sustaining her self-esteem. From what Clara says, love does not seem reasonable, and yet she explains why Zack should want her referring to "rational" reasons. She is thus rationalizing her situation in order to not frame herself as "insignificant" (in the eyes of the other). This also seems consistent with her bringing up Anders (who wants to build a relationship with her) when referring to Zack (who does not)—in order to highlight her desirability and, thus, sustain her self-esteem. Although it seems that not

ending up with Anders was due to a “lucky” coincidence, since, at the time, Clara wanted them to be together, perhaps she hopes that, at some point, it will turn out the same way with Zack. The aggression that Clara expresses towards Zack seems to be an extension of an unexpected sexual desire: a displacement of the real loss that is manifested in the anxiety of losing him by surviving herself. “Maybe he’ll mature,” Clara writes. “In lack of something better: a soulmate and the most intense sex I’ve ever had. I think he feels the same way. I think he also feels like we are something completely unique together.” This is the voice, or more correctly—the writings, of an abandoned subject. However, Clara is not yet separated from Zack, since he is kept alive by being incorporated in Clara’s sense of self. She resembles the type of melancholic depressive person Kristeva describes as suicidal, meaning that she wishes to disappear, since the other, which is being housed within her, is evil, but at the same time—a part of her individual personality. Clara is far from being the only one, amongst the persons I have spoken to, who brings life to this train of thought. Elin, a Swedish, highly-educated woman in her thirties, expresses it thus:

X has already deprived me of my dignity and pulverized me into nothingness. Something is seriously wrong with me, but we already knew that. I’m depressed and just care about him so damn much. Can’t bear to fail in love like this, but can’t see the end of it. Can hardly breathe right now because of all the anguish and sadness... How can it be that X just doesn’t want to see me... He’s still crushed by his ex, he said on the phone yesterday. She was a 22-year-old drug addict... Like, what the hell! I’m too good for him...

right??? And to not just be able to say you don’t want to hang out anymore and I have said way too many great and honest and bleeding things... Can someone shoot me now? He really despises me now. I am such a fucking stupid moron. Fuck, shoot me, please. X should crave for, and beg and cry to hang out with ME! And if he’s not doing that, then he’s not worthy of me. Fuck, I’m so damn tired of diminishing myself and being self-effacingly destructive. ENOUGH NOW!!!

Elin speaks of herself as being depressed. She thinks, just as Clara, that there is something seriously wrong with her. The fact that Elin expresses herself in such manner is not necessarily a result of her frustration with the other. It could also be a result of a more primitive self that is hurt, incomplete, and empty: a narcissistic wound. As I mentioned earlier, it has been noted that depressed people do not always consider them to be wronged or offended, but instead experience that something is seriously wrong with them. It has thus been suggested that the composite of melancholy and depression is the most archaic form, or expression, of the non-symbolic unnamable narcissistic wound, which is so valuable to the melancholic depressive person that no one on the outside can be used as a reference point. As I have come to understand it, the melancholic-depressive composite can be seen as an unconscious way to deal with rejection—with not being desired the way one wants to be desired—and includes a wide range of emotions and discursive practices aimed at rationalizing one’s situation. Refusing to let go, there is no other choice but to withdraw from the other by enacting autotelic desire or silencing the other, that is, staging the love relationship or playing the game in one’s own head.

However, this means that one refrains from the struggle for recognition as a concrete being with needs and desires, which one is unable to satisfy on one's own. In this state, one's free will remains abstract and one's self or personal identity unrealized. When silencing the other, the depressed mood is and remains the only substitute that the melancholic depressive person can relate to, and it is being nourished and kept alive in the absence of any other substitute or because the other as a concrete being has been silenced. The thought of suicide is, in such a case, not a disguised act, a tragic and ill-concealed wish to kill the other, but a fusion between the depressed mood and the despair felt. The object of love is transformed to a light with no representation and the problem seems to be that no erotic object can replace what is lost, which leads to one disappointing love relationship following another. Alternatively, the depressed will fall back into loneliness with the unmentionable thing, which can only be recognized in experiences of discouragement and despair. Melancholic depressive persons are robbed of all meaning, because they have left the intersubjective sphere in which abstract freedom and personal identity transform into actual freedom and personal identity. They are captured by their own affections, which is a state that, in my opinion, is encouraged by the individualization, rationalization, and commercialization of love in contemporary culture, and aided by the increased use of Internet in intimate communication. The stage is set for a desire that does not seek its satisfaction, that is, a desire that desires desire or autotelic desire. Without any trust in the healing powers of language, and I would add mutual self-disclosure as concrete beings with needs and desires, melancholic depres-

sive persons cannot physically unite with the other (over time), nor can they psychologically process its loss. In Clara's life, one bad relationship follows another, and discouragement and despair seem to be the feelings that Clara most strongly identifies with:

It is over with Zack. He turned out to be exactly as immature as I feared, but as I hoped he would turn out not to be. He has hurt me and treated me like shit. I'm so fucking sad and so fucking disappointed and everything feels SHITTY. He's probably had a girlfriend this whole time and just had me like an erotic adventure, and so when I'm only a few blocks away from him, he freaks out 'cause he can't handle his feelings and the mental issues involved in keeping his girlfriend and me apart, I'm fairly certain that that's what happened. And it feels SHITTY, to have been deceived and scammed by him... And I hate it. And to not have meant more to him than some kind of fictitious adventure when I was so fuuuucking in love. And when I should've taken all the warning signs seriously like everyone else said and did... I'm such an idiot, Ann. But, NOW it's OVER with him.

Conclusion

From this article, we have learned that it is common to understand love as a game that can be played without mutual recognition of one another as needy and desiring creatures worthy of loving care. This distortion of love results in a tendency to not let go of lost love objects and a need for strategies to handle the absence of love in an intimate relationship. One strategy is to enact autotelic desire, that is, a hyper-autonomous form of desire that aims at itself and causes strong emotional experiences. Another strategy is to internalize the lost object of love

as part of the self, resulting in melancholic depression, that is, an affective state in which it is impossible to put one's experience of shortage or despair into words in a meaningful way. In both cases, the other as concrete being with a personal identity is neglected in order to keep the own personal identity intact or avoid loss of self-esteem. However, personal identity and self-esteem is dependent on the free and self-giving aspect of love. Although love tries

to transcend the differences between two unique beings with needs and desires, it is dependent on there being a difference to stimulate the drive for unity. Contemporary culture's stress on individual freedom and independence neglects the necessity of the other's radical difference for the development of personal identity. This becomes evident when considering the disappearance of the other within contemporary love relationships.

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