Anders Johansson, Mid-Sweden University, Sweden

What Was Love? On the Dialectic of Mediation

Abstract

Love has traditionally been understood either as an objective, transcendentforce, or a subjective ability. Through a number of steps,the article argues that both these options have lost their credibility due to changes in the media through which love is performed. First, the article demonstrates how the attempts,in the life sciences, to explain love biologically or physically reproduce a traditional romantic ideology. Then, the implications of the inflation of explicit love declarations, and the consequences of internet dating, are discussed. What these examples amount to is the fact that the medium is brought to the fore. A consequence of this is that the romantic ideology is strengthened, while the premises of romantic love – the autonomous subject and the transcendent objectivity – are weakened or even dissolved.

Keywords:idealism, materialism, narcissism, subjectivity, reification,internet dating, control

1. Introduction

Jennifer Lopez, Haddaway, Howard Jones – yes, virtually every singer, author,or philosopher since Sappho and Platohave raised the same question: What is love? This endless recurrence may be taken as a sign both of the aptness and inaptness of the question. The huge amount of answers makes it impossible to say anything that hasn't already been said. Every love song is a cliché from the outset. On the other hand, the fact that the question keeps coming up over and over again, points to the endurance of the experience of or longing for love, and hence to the inevitability of the issue.

This could support the widespread notion that if virtually everything in modern existence is relative, love is the exception. Love is conceived as something transcendent: a miracle, a force of nature, something beyond human control and all negotiation. There are, of course, several variants of this understanding – from Plato to Sex in the City, from Dante to bell hooks (Plato; Hooks 155, 165–188) – but the general traits are the same: in love we come into contact with something higher than all the trivial compromises we are otherwise caught up in. Love thus implies a loss of control: the autonomous subject is subordinated to something else. In love we no longer control what we are and what we want – and this is exactly why we want it.

However, there is also a just as widespread notion of love as an ability belonging to the subject. As Harry G. Frankfurt puts it, it is not the case that we love things or persons because of their great value, on the contrary,"what we love necessarily acquires value for us because we love it" (Frankfurt 38–39). In this perspective, love must be understood as something performative, an act that doesn't come from above but rather from within the corporeal human subject. "Love is an active power in man," as Eric Fromm decisively states (20). Love is thus not something transcendent, but something that we do; it is an act for which no one can be held responsible but the individual subject. Hence love is created and controlled entirely by the subject, projecting his or her love according to the innermost feelings.

One might argue that the modern, Western notion of romantic love (the modern version of eros) is actually constituted by this tension: love is neither objective, nor subjective, and this is the simple reason why people continue singing about it, searching for it, praising it, suffering under it. And yet I would argue that this notion of romantic love is nevertheless in crisis.Formulated as a hypothesis – love has changed during the last decades, as an effect of changes in the media through which love is performed. In short, both the performing subject and the outcome of the performance is harder and harder to distinguish from the media of the performance. Does this mean the end of romantic love, or just a minor shift within this paradigm? Is it really love, or perhaps subjectivity, that is changing? I will try to answer these questions through a series of steps, which will bring the mediation of love to the fore.

2. Flesh

Love is an idealist story: “practically the entire corpus of both trivial and serious literature can be read as an unfolding of the idealist concept of love,” as the literary scholar Rainer Just remarks. (Just)Of course there are exceptions – in his monumental work The Nature of Love, Irving Singer mentions Lucretius, Schopenhauer, and Zola (Singer 3–4),and one could certainly find more in the feminist tradition – but as an overall picture,there is some truth in this: the materialist theories of love have never been more than marginal reactions to the dominating idealism.

And yet there is an interest, in Singer for example, in bridging this gap. More categorically,he puts his faith in the future of the natural sciences: “These different branches of the life sciences, seeking empirical solutions to questions about love and sexuality and devoted to ideals of health and harmonious functioning in nature, belong to a new ideology that offers great hope for the future” (Singer 486). What Singer hoped for was a new synthesis between realism and idealism, between the empirical findings of the natural sciencesand the conceptual arguments of the humanities: “the contemporary synthesis of realism and idealism, of verifiable truth and meaningful aspiration, remains as an unfinished cathedral in the mind. Thus far, little more than the groundwork has been laid. Coming generations may someday marvel when they see what was being built” (Singer 487).

Notwithstanding the optimism – not to say naivety – of his comment, hehasundeniably, in a way, been proven right. For without doubt, there has been an increased interest in the experience of love in the natural sciences during the last decades. The progress in areas like bio-chemistry and neuroscience has made it possible to really observe what happens to the human body when we fall in love. In other words, finally it seems to be possible to give a scientific, empirical answer to the question of what love is. The mystery of love is demystified. Sappho, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, the whole literary history of love declarations, poems, and stories – was it just a long series of expressions of the oxytocin levels of the writers?

Given the research on love in the life sciences, that bold conclusion is not as far-fetched as it may sound. There seems to be an accord today that oxytocin is a crucial ingredient in love. As Sue Carter and Stephen W. Porges formulate it in the introduction to their article “The Biochemistry of Love: An Oxytocin Hypothesis,” “love is clearly not ‘just’ an emotion; it is a biological process that is both dynamic and bidirectional in several dimensions” (Carter and Porges 12).As already the title indicates, Carter and Porges argue for the crucial function of oxytocin in these processes. Although

it would be an exaggeration to see oxytocin aslove's molecular equivalent, peptides like oxytocin and vasopressin certainly do have a vital significance as components in a bigger neurochemical system. It is not only our ability to love and attach to children and other people that is regulated by oxytocin, it also affects our health and wellbeing in general. Since oxytocin is anti-inflammatory, it is a crucial ingredient in the autoimmune ability of the human body. In that way, Carter and Porges argue, love is also a protection against stress and diseases.

What is interesting in this context is not the strength of their results, but the ideology behind them. While the perspective of their article is strictly biological, and the argumentation empirically grounded, a formulation in the conclusion stands out in an interesting way: "A life without love is not a life fully lived" (Carter and Porges 16). Isn't this a point where empirical science tips over into pure ideology? Or expressed in Singer's terms – the traditional idealist tradition becomes visible as the underlying foundation of this particular case of extreme materialism. If this is the synthesis Singer dreamt of, there is certainly a need of a more dialectical attitude. The problem is not only the presupposed concept of "love," but also and above all the implicit aspiration to be able to grade and value life. For what is a life that is "fully lived"? And what is life that doesn't live up to that norm? The strict materialism of the life sciences discloses its underlying idealism.

Carter and Porges' article isnot an exception. In the scientific discourse on love, the traditional idealism pops up every now and then – implicitly, sometimes explicitly, often in mottos, initial or concluding rhetorical remarks about the importance and inscrutability of love. Another example is Francesco Bianchi-Demicheli, Scott T. Grafton, and Stephanie Ortigue's article "The Power of Love on the Human Brain." Even though some of the ideas from Carter and Porges' article return here (above all,the significance given to dopamine levels, oxytocin, etc.), the logic of their article is in a way the opposite one: their aim is not to explain what love is, but to investigate the effects of being in love on other brain activities. As they express it themselves, it is "cognitive top-down processes" they focus on, i.e. how romantic associations affect cognition. Through two experiments they try to prove that there is "a causal linkage between the state of being in love and human cognition" (Bianchi-Demicheli et al 100).The ideology of romantic love, however, stays the same. The very first sentence of the abstract sets the tone: "Romantic love has been the source for some of the greatest achievements of mankind throughout the ages" (Bianchi-Demicheliet al 90).

In this perspective, the measuring of the raised dopamine levels in the frontal lobe doesn't make any difference at all. It does give a semblance of naturalness to the existing romantic paradigm – or rather, to the one that was present in the USA when today's researchers were young – according to which monogamy is better than promiscuity, long relationships are better than short, and "love" means love for wife and kids. These values actually comprise the unreflected foundation of the biological explanations, not the other way around. The neurons and oxytocin levels are the material medium which is mistaken for a natural foundation.

3. Language

What all this points to is that the progress made in the natural sciences doesn't change much regarding our understanding of love. The new, more precise materialist explanations never really cause a rupture with the existing idealist notion of love. On the contrary, this notion is confirmed; both the outset and the conclusion stay within the established romantic paradigm. If love is a feeling that may be explained biologically,the culturalsignificanceof lovewill either remain intact or stand out as irrelevant. As demonstrated above, the former option is very common.

This actually confirms what Niklas Luhmann tries to demonstrate in his book Love as Passion: love is not primarily a physical condition, but a cultural code of communication (Luhmann 8–9, 20). If people fall in love, it is thanks to a love semantics that precedes theindividual subjects. The reactions in our brains are responses to what we have learned about love from literature, language, film, music etc. Or as Denis de Rougemont puts it, "Whatever can be said about love through the ages is based on the discourse on love, for what love 'really' is must escape us" (de Rougemont 94).In this perspective, if we, hypothetically, could measure the oxytocin levels of a newly-wed person from the Middle Ages, the result wouldn't really tell us anything new at all, since those levels would be nothing but a symptom of a subjective reaction to the "code" or "discourse" that was present at that time. There is no love that is not mediated. Thus, the initial question – What is love? – cannot be posed without approaching these media. In other words, the question may be rephrased: In which ways are the emotions and affects we understand as "love" mediated today? Or: What are the characteristics of the affects and emotions produced by the code of love that are prevalent in the Western world today?

It was suggested in a Swedish radio programme on language some time ago, that the phrase “Jag älskar dig” (I love you) has become more frequentin the Swedish language during the last half century. Today, unlike forty years ago, people in general tend to declare their love fortheir children rather often, and the phrase seems to be used more frequently between lovers as well. This impression is verified in an empirical study by Elisabeth Gareis and Richard Wilkins on the use of love declarations in Germany and the USA. Gareis and Wilkins demonstrate that the phrases “I love you” and “Ich liebe dich” seem to have become more common recently: “Both Americans and Germans reported that the locution ‘I love you’ is used more now than in the past” (Gareis and Wilkins 316).

This gives rise to at least two questions: firstly, what are the causes behind this change, and secondly what does this change imply – emotionally, ethically, politically? Of course the meaning of the phrase depends on the context, language, and historical situation. “I love you” doesn’t have exactly the same connotations in American English as in Swedish or German for example, and it wasn’t used in the same way in the 19th century as today. These differences notwithstanding, the increased use appears to be the same, and thus the fundamental question as well: how shall this change in the code of love be understood and explained?

A first explanation, an obvious one, is hinted at by Gareis and Wilkins: if there has been an increase in the use of the phrases “I love you” and “Ich liebe dich,” “[t]he majority of respondents view this increase as a positive result of greater emotional openness and freedom” (Gareis and Wilkins 316). In other words, people have become better at expressing their feelings, less shy, more generous, more open with what used to be regarded as private, etc. People today simply have better contact with their own subjective emotions than yesterday.

However, if one takes a closer look at the phrase, things are not that simple. Few phrases are as ambiguous as the declaration “I love you.” On the one hand, several authors and theoreticians have demonstrated or reflected upon the crucial status of this affirmation. The Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni, to take one example, describes it as “the radical change” (Alberoni 47). To say “I love you” implies a step out of a collective existence, into the monogamous relationship. “‘I love you’ is, in essence, a sacrament that brings about an irreversible change of the social situation and everyone who is affected by it,” Alberoni writes (Alberoni 47).

At the same time,“I love you” is the most worn out phrase one can imagine. In virtually every film and every pop song one encounters it. In that sense, “I love you” is arguably the most commodified statement there is. And yet it maintains something of the power Alberoni describes. As the protagonist in Jeanette Winterson’s novel Written on the Body puts it,“Why is it that the most unoriginal thing we can say to one another is still the thing we long to hear? ‘I love you’ is always a quotation. You did not say it first and neither did I, yet when you say it and when I say it we speak like savages who have found three words and worship them” (Winterson 9).

This seems to call into question the positive conclusion – we have become better at expressing our feelings – referred to above. Aren’t we, as loving subjects, products of the discourse as much as agents of the discourse? “‘I love you’ is always a quotation,” to quote Winterson again. When we declare our love explicitly, we are always imitating someone or something, to a certain extent in accordance with platonic idealism.It’s just that the “memories” or recollections” of the soul (Plato, Phaedrus) today are provided by big media corporations. Wasn’t it, in fact, the culture industry at large – pop music, TV shows, films, literature – that spread the use of the phrase around the world? One example is Robert Benton’s film Kramer vs Kramer from 1979. Here the protagonists are saying “I love you” all the time: the father to his son, the clerk to his boss, the child to his father. The same formula is present in very different kinds of relationships.

This may actually be understood as an expression of the family drama in the film: since the mother/wife has left the family, the father/ex-husband/colleague expresses his love repeatedly, to compensate the loss. Hence the phrase is obviously not the sacrament or miracle Alberoni talked about; it is rather an act of communication or control: the speaking I wants to transmit something to the you addressed, but also to himself and the whole situation (cf. Solomon 37). There may be both a positive and a negative interpretation of this: the inflation of love declarations is a consequence of the breakdown of a patriarchal structure – something is liberated, new emotions surge. Or: the intimate sphere is invaded by a form of communication and control belonging to the commercial sector. Everything is made explicit, the most intimate feelings are reified.

Eva Illouz’ bookSaving the Modern Soul might be helpful here. This book describes the rise of a new “emotional field” – healthcare, the universities, the culture industry, the pharmaceutical industry are all part of it – where mental health and self-realisation are the commodities that are

circulated. Underneath all disagreements within this wide field there is, Illouz argues, a shared notion of the emotional life of human beings as something in need of coaching, of improvement, development. This improvement is to be conducted by the subjects themselves: through my own narration of who I am, I can transform myself. But since the self-fulfilment that is strived for can never be completely achieved – there is always the option to continue the narration – the primary outcome is not a healthy subject however, but, ironically, a suffering subject. Accordingly the therapeutic ideology implies two conflicting notions of the self: the self as a victim of the social circumstances, and the self as the sole author and agent of its own life (Illouz, Saving184).

If the inclination to declare one's love verbally has increased, that change fits very well into the pattern Illouz describes. Love has become something that the individual is supposed to manage and put into effect by way of language; the individual creates love in narrating his own life and pronouncing his or her innermost emotions; he or she even produces the emotions by pronouncing them. This production is concentrated in the phrase "I love you," where the I realises him- or herself as a loving subject. The love declarations are simply crucial ingredients in the story of ourselves that we're constantly narrating.

In that perspective there is something utterly self-centered in the inflation of love declarations. They appear to be directed to the speaking I itself, rather than to the you addressed. Hence, if love declarations have become more frequent, this may be taken as a sign of an increased narcissism (cf. Lasch, McCain,and Campbell).One may also argue, however, that self-love and narcissism is an ingredient inall love. As Sara Ahmed demonstrates, my love of someone or something else – a lover, a child, a pet, a nation – is indirectly a love of myself, in the sense that it is my own value that is confirmed through my love (Ahmed 128–29; Kierkegaard 143–46). In other words narcissism doesn't explain much; it is a symptom in need of explanation rather than an explanation in itself.

Hence there is a point in taking Illouz' argument one step further and lookingat the technology behind the narrations and expressions we're forced to perform. Gareis and Wilkins point to the fact that the new communication technology is often very well suited for short love declarations, including abbreviations like ILD for "Ich liebe dich." A respondent in the investigation remarked that, "Many young people end a phone conversation by saying 'luv ya' [L-U-VY-A]. It's hard for the listener to discern whether it is genuine or just a cliché" (Gareis and Wilkins 317). If this comment

is receptive, it is also in a way very old-fashioned: no, it is no longer possible to distinguish between the genuine and the cliché, but that is exactly the point, that is what makes phrases like “luv ya” attractive to use. The old distinction between authenticity and falseness no longer applies. That the expressions often lack a grammatical subject – “luv ya” – is significant in that sense: it is as if the phrases have almost gained independence from the users. This only makes thequestion more pertinent: Who is responsible for this jargon, who is declaring this luv? Where does the agency reside? Isn’t it in fact the phones themselves, the devices and the financial interests behind them? Samsung, talking to Apple…

4. Economy

When the Swedish author Thomas Thorild (1759–1808) lived in England for a period at the end of the 1780s, he was bewildered by the advertisements for a partner in the newspapers: “Constantly one saw Announcements, in the Dailies, by Persons looking for such and such a Subject for Marriage. This, in all earnestness, was every so often some old Bachelor who after several years now had come home rich from India, or else it was some shrewd Maiden who recently inherited from a blessed Aunt and had become independent” (Thorild 123). As Thorild’s remark makes clear, lonely-hearts columns aren’t a new thing. The longing for a partner has been permeated by a market logic at least for as long as there has been capitalism. Or as Erich Fromm puts it, “In a culture in which the marketing orientation prevails, and in which material success is the outstanding value, there is little reason to be surprised that human love relations follow the same pattern of exchange which governs the commodity and the labour market” (Fromm 4).

And yet it would be naïve to believe that this hasn’t changed since the 18th century. The technological development has to be taken into account, above all with the arrival of internet dating. As far back as 2002, dating sites were the most profitable pay sites globally; since 2010 internet dating is believed to be the most common way to meet a partner in countries like Sweden (Carling; cf. Illouz,Cold Intimacies 76). That dating sites are a lucrative business is obvious, but the point is also that economic logic has entered into and changed the erotic desire as such. This is, in short, what Illouz convincingly demonstrates in the chapter on internet dating in her book Cold Intimacies. According to Illouz, the calculating and economic attitude has occupied the behavior of

the users. A crucial aspect behind this development is the visualisation of an enormous “market” of potential partners. This very visualization induces both a kind of profitability calculation (How many seconds should I give to each potential object? How narrow should my demands be? What is the value of my own commodity?), and a constant and general urge to improve one’s own position on the market. As one of Illouz’s informants comments, everyone desires someone “‘above their league’, someone who is worth more than they themselves” (Cold Intimacies 87).

This leads once again to the question of where the agency is situated. The dating sites present themselves as a means to help the individual take control over his or her own love life. In other words, love is understood as something utterly subjective, something which the individual subject is supposed to administer and control. This subjective control is in fact what the dating sites have to offer. As it is formulated in a Swedish handbook for internet dating,“You decide. It is totally up to you who you want to contact and which emails you want to answer. It is you who are in control” (Hagberg and Bjerre 10).

To a certain extent this is correct: you are free to form your own identity or “profile” at the keyboard, you answer the emails you want, you log in and out when you feel like it, you administer the whole thing from your own couch. In that sense, the dating sites inject the liberal ideology of a free choice into the love discourse. As Illouz puts it, “No technology I know of has radicalized in such an extreme way the notion of the self as a ‘chooser’ and the idea that the romantic encounter should be the result of the best possible choice” (Cold Intimacies 79).Butby who and on which premises are these choices made?

Often the sites claim to match the right partners: the personalities of the clients are charted through long questionnaires. The subjects are broken down into trivial elements (Do you like to have breakfast in bed? What’s your favorite movie? Where do you like to travel?), in order to be guided to their true counterparts. Another aspect of this is that the dating sites tend to be more and more specialized – there are sites for golfers, academics, Christians, etc. On Tinder the distribution is left to the market logic itself: depending on how good you look you will find a match that looks just as good, according to the supply and demand and the preferences of the market. What all this points to is, in any case, that the individual clients succumb to a machine or apparatus, which not only (in the best case) fulfils, but also produces the desires, dreams, and ideals of the individuals.

A comment in a net dating-handbook is telling: “A positive consequence of net dating intensively is that one becomes more clearly aware of what one is looking for, what one wants from life and how to express it. Probably because one constantly gets the chance to tell it to the people one meets” (Hagberg and Bjerre 14). The comment implies a dynamic subject, containing a static core of authenticity, partly concealed to the subject itself. At the same time,the idea is that the inner authentic desires may be revealed by – and to – the subject, who is supposed to adapt to them after a period of net dating. However, this adaptation may also be understood in another way. What is disregarded in the handbook comment is both that you, as a user, start to shape yourself according to the preferences that are prevalent, rather than to some inner “self,” and that you start to desire what the sites present to you. Where, then, is the agency behind this shaping situated? Isn’t it the very system, the “machine,” rather than the individual, that transforms the user into a more desirable object or commodity and into a desiring consumer? The system improves itself: it makes its own parts – the individual users – work together more smoothly.

In that perspective, a relocation of subjectivity seems to be taking place: through the means provided by the site, I increase my opportunities to meet a partner, but by doing this I turn myself into a more desirable object, contributing to the power of the site. In other words, I am, along the lines of Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation, subjected to the system (or the Subject with capital S) through my autonomous subjective actions(Althusser 56). The ideology that is actualized and reproduced through this interpellation, and materialized through the rituals performed by the dating subjects, is in this case romantic love. Hence, there is nothing new in this, except that internet dating brings a new efficiency to the interpellation.

It is telling, in that perspective, that net dating seems to be addictive. There is a tendency that people who start net dating find it hard to quit, no matter if they have found a partner or not. If this type of addiction can be found in all online activity, it is also to some extent an effect of the specific net dating logic itself: even if you do find your “perfect match,” how can you know that there isn’t an even better one still to be found?If you are searching for the love or your life, a friend or a sex partner doesn’t really make a difference in that respect. The market with all its tempting options is still there – you just have to log-in again for it to materialize – and on every market there is always a better bargain to be made. The bargaining subject you had to become in order to find your

partner has hardly disappeared just because you succeeded – it's just in-between deals. As Wera Aretz states, "dating apps like Tinder, in the age of 'serial monogamy', offers a convenient possibility among young people to try if there might be another partner that would fulfil the expectations in a better way" (Aretz 49). This observation points to the crucial irony of internet dating: on the one hand the sites and appscertainly play on the traditional romantic dreams of "the right one," the family, "livinghappily ever after," and so on; on the other hand, it is not in the interest of the dating sites to create faithful partners, they want faithful clients, meaning unfaithful partners. And in this they are obviously very successful.

All this points to a transformation that concurs with the earlier observations: that which is regarded as just a medium, a tool for finding a partner, turns into the desired object itself. The logic is the same as the one Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin observedin sex chatting over a decade ago: the desire for immediacy (a meeting "irl") slowly turns into a desire for the medium itself (Bolter and Grusin 260).What's new is the extent to which the dating sites have managed to turn the desire of the subjects, the longing to find a partner, to a means to make a profit (Cf. Dean 114).

According to Illouz, "Internet dating sites have one goal: to facilitate the search for romance or even true love" (Why Love Hurts 180).Notwithstanding the many insights of her analysis, we can now see that this is not the whole picture. Illouz simply foresees the fundamental purpose of the sites: to make a profit. This leads to a certain blindness to the unfreedom of the subjects, an oversight of their capacity as mere functions in the profitable apparatus.

5. Technology

Step by step we seem to be approaching the conclusion that the very mediations of love – peptides and neurons, words, phones, and dating sites – have moved to the fore and, in different ways, turned into the thing itself. Another way of putting it is that the old subject/object-dialectic, or idealism/materialism-divide, described at the beginning of the article, can no longer capture what is going on when love is felt or expressed or performed. It has become harder and harder to distinguish the subject and the object from the media through which we are bound to act, feel, and communicate.

At the same time, one thing remains intact: the ideology of romantic love. The dating sites may enhance our chances to find a partner, and redirect our desires, but it is the same old romantic dreams they capitalize on. The advancements in the life sciences give us a more precise picture of what's going on in the brain and molecules of the loving subject, but the romantic ideals that are presupposed and confirmed in this research are basically the sameas in any romancenovel. The love declarations become more frequent, but it is increasingly unclear who is expressing them and who they are directed at.

In order to really get at this change, a more refined understanding of the media is necessary, a theory that may account for the dialectic of subjection in a more thorough or nuanced way. One may argue that this is what Luhmann provides, but his study on the code of love ends before the age of smartphones and net dating.How these devices have affected our understanding of love, yes our very experiences and performances of love, is still an open query. The somewhat unusual question, raised by Kevin Kelly, may be just the right onein this context: What does technology want?

In the case of net-dating, the answer seems to be simple: the dating sites simply want profit. But Kelly's question is more concerned with the very technical development as such – the "technium" as he calls it. "Extrapolated, technology wants what life wants," Kelly argues (Kelly 335).More concretely, this meansincreasing efficiency, specialization, diversity, structure, beauty, and mutualism, according to Kelly. There is simply no conflict between the evolution of life and the evolution of technology.Hence, one could argue that the technological development of internet dating is an inevitable evolution to be affirmed, since it increases the opportunities and efficiency of our needs to find a partner.

If there is something disturbingly evangelical to Kelly's ideas, Peter Haff offers a related but more nuanced picture. Technology, Haff notes, is normally considered as a derivative phenomenon, a consequence of our human activities. This image is no longer possible, he states: "Most of the time, most of us work to support the technosphere whether we know that it exists or not, and whether we want to or not" (Haff 134). This is indeed a crucial point that is usually disregarded in the net dating discourse. A way to put it is that we need to get out of the subject/object-divide (where humans are on one side, and technology on the other) and see, as Haff puts it, "how

certain conditions deriving from requirements of scale and organization reinforce the idea of humans as parts of, rather than simply creators and users of, modern technology" (Haff 135). Although he is not talking explicitly about dating sites or dating apps, the argument is certainly applicable in that context.

But what's so new about this? Couldn't the same thing be said about older technology as well? After all, love has always been mediated. Before the smart phone there were public phones, before text messages there were hand-written letters, before dating apps there were lonely hearts columns, before Instagram there were love poems, etc. And yet already this enumeration contains its own counterargument. A love poem and an Instagram account are totally different devices, with completely different functions. In order to maintain that love stays the same, no matter how it is mediated, one has to ignore that the means of communication always carry agency in themselves. Tinder gives the user the impression of being in control, but the control work both ways. Put differently, control is spread out so that we, as individuals, can no longer claim to be the sole agents behind it.

This is an argument made also by Bernard Stiegler in a discussion on smart devices. The things surrounding us are supposed to respond to our subjective needs and wishes – this is what their "smartness" consists of (Stiegler 137). Everything is connected, everything is controlled at a distance by the smartphone user. At a closer look, however, it is not so clear who is controlling who, Stiegler argues.

The strength of Stiegler's argument is that he goes to the core of the development, citing Jérémie Zimmerman on the technology of smartphones:

The PCs that became available to the broad public in the 1980s were completely understandable and programmable by their users. This is no longer the case with the new mobile computers, which are designed so as to prevent the user from accessing some of the functions and options. The major problem is the so-called baseband chip that is found at the heart of the device. All communications with the outside – telephone conversations, SMS, email, data – pass through this chip. More and more, these baseband chips are fused with the interior of the microprocessor; they are integrated with the main chip of the mobile computer. Now, none of the specifications for any of these chips are available, so we know nothing about them and cannot control them. Conversely, it

is potentially possible for the manufacturer or the operator to have access, via these chips, to your computer (Stiegler 137–8).

The instance of control has moved from the humans to the machines, from the "user" to the device itself, partly due to the technical development.The point here is that the changes in the technical devices have an effect on how people interact on the dating scene, and hence what "people" are, what we desire and how love relations develop. The answer to Kelly's question –What does technology want? – may thus be: It wants to be used, in order to extend its agency.

6. Conclusion

This seems to leave us with a rather sad conclusion: the ideology of romantic love may be stronger than ever, but this strength seems to imply a corresponding dissolution both of love as a subjective performance, and of love as an eternal idea. If love, to quote Fromm again, is "an active power in man," the question is where this power resides: in the organism's need of oxytocin, in the linguistic habits, in the market logic, in the microchips of the smartphones…? (Fromm 20). The idea of love as something otherworldly, transcendent, miraculous in its turn is still there. In fact, the problem is that it is always supposed to be there, just a click away, as any commodity. Transcendence is folded into the media. Our longing for love is more efficiently mediatized and reified than ever before. Hence, the irony is that the heightened romanticism of today arguably implies the end of the premises of romantic love: both the subjective and the objective aspects which romantic love has always consisted of are dissolved or mediatized. Love can only be addressed in the past tense: what was it?

And yet, perhaps one might give this a more positive interpretation: what if this was always the case? The autonomous individual was in fact always a product of the circumstances; the miracle of love was never more than a subjective sensation. A problem with the traditional ways of understanding love (love as an objective miraculous event which strikes us now and then, or as a subjective capability in each one of us) is that theyare blind to the virtual or medial premises of our declarations, gestures, actions, feelings, and ideas. It may be the case that these premises today are more tangible and important than ever. Love, in this perspective, may very well be understood

as an event, but a minor one, something which is present in every single moment, something which precedes the intentions of the subject, and thus cannot be grasped as something present. In this perspective all the “luv ya”s, “likes” and Tinder swipes on smart phones may be both narcissist and unfree, but also signs pointing to the continuance of a love which creates us rather than the other way around.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. Cultural Politics of Emotion. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. Print.

Alberoni, Francesco. Il volo nuziale.Milano: Garzanti, 1992. Print.

Althusser, Louis. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation). On Ideology. London: Verso, 2008. 1-60. Print.

Aretz, Wera.“Match me if you can. Eine explorative Studie zur Beschreibung der Nutzung von Tinder.”Journal of Business and Media Psychology 6.1 (2015): 41–51. Print.

Barthes, Roland. A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments. London: Vintage, 2002. Print.

Bianchi-Demicheli, F. et al.“The power of love on the human brain.”Social Neuroscience 1.2 (2006): 90–103. Print.

Boltanski, Luc.Love and Justice: Three Essays on the Sociology of Action. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012. Print.

Bolter, J. D. and Richard Grusin. Remediation: Understanding New Media. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2000. Print.

Carling, Maria. “Var fjärde relation börjar på nätet.”Svenska Dagbladet, 15 April, 2010. Print.

Carter, C. Sue and Stephen W. Porges.“The Biochemistry of Love: An Oxytocin hypothesis.”EMBO reports 14.1 (2013): 12–16. Print.

de Rougemont, Denis. “Love.”Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas. Vol. 3. Ed. P. P. Wiener. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973.94-108. Print.

Dean, Jodi. Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010. Print.

Frankfurt, Harry G.The Reasons of Love. Princeton: Princeton University Press,2004. Print.

Fromm, Erich. The Art of Loving. New York: Harper and Row, 1956. Print.

Gareis, Elisabeth and Richard Wilkins. “Love expression in the United States and Germany.” International Journal of Intercultural Relations 35 (2011): 307–19. Print.

Haff, Peter. “Humans and Technology in the Anthropocene: Six Rules.”The Anthropocene Review 1.2(2014): 126–36. Print.

Hagberg, Marie and Lisa Bjerre.Nätdejting: Allt du behöver veta. Stockholm: Lind and Co, 2008. Print.

Hooks, Bell.All about Love: New Visions. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001. Print.

Illouz, Eva. Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007. Print.

Illouz, Eva. Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-help. Oakland: University of California Press, 2008. Print.

Illouz, Eva. Why Love Hurts. A Sociological Explanation. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012. Print.

Just, Rainer. “Against love: Seeking the literary traces of the Natascha Kampusch affair.”Eurozine. 27 Mar.2007. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.

Kelly, Kevin.What Technology Wants. New York: Viking, 2010. Print.

Kierkegaard, Søren. The Seducer’s Diary. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. Print.

Lasch, Christopher. The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations.London: W.W. Norton & Company,1991. Print.

Luhmann, Niklas.Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012. Print.

McCain, Jessica L. and Keith W. Campbell. “Narcissism and Social Media Use: A Meta-Analytic Review.”Psychology of Popular Media Culture 10 (November, 2016), DOI: 10.1037/ppm0000137.

Nygren, Anders. Agape and Eros. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969. Print.

Singer, Irving. The Nature of Love:Courtly and Romantic. Vol. 2.Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984. Print.

Plato. Phaedrus. The Project Gutenberg. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.

Plato.Symposium. The Project Gutenberg. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.

Solomon, Robert.About Love: Reinventing Romance for our Times. Washington DC: Rowman and Littlefield,1994. Print.

Stiegler, Bernard.“Automatic Society 1: The Future of Work – Introduction.”La Deleuziana – Online Journal of Philosophy1 (2015): 121–140. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.

Thorild, Thomas. “Harmonien. Eller Allmän Plan för en Uplyst och Ägta Kärleksförening.”Samlade skrifter. Vol. 4. Eds. Arvidson, S. and C. Fontaine. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1944. Print.

Winterson, J.Written on the Body. London: Quality Paperbacks Direct, 1992. Print.



Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License