



Digital Eros and its symptom.

Eros digital y su síntoma.

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ABSTRACT

In this paper i present some axes that make up the digitization of love lifestyle and certain sytoms that cause the use of the new technologies. I proceed in four coordinates: firts i start by explaining the entry of affective life into the digital space, then i develop the concept of sexual capital, later i mention what is a new writing of Eros and finally i analyze what is the symptomatic use of new technologies.

Keywords: Eros. Digitization. Sexual capital. New technologies.

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se expondrán algunos ejes que conforman la digitalización de la vida amorosa y ciertos síntomas que provocan el uso de las nuevas tecnologías. Procedo en cuatro coordenadas: primero parto en explicar el ingreso de la vida afectiva al espacio digital, luego desarrollo el concepto de capital sexual, posteriormente menciono lo que es una nueva escritura de Eros y finalmente analizo lo que es el uso sintomático de las nuevas tecnologías.

Palabras claves: Eros. Digital. Capital sexual. Nuevas tecnologías.



Love interrogates us, as has happened since ancient Greece with Plato's *Banquet*, also in the early twentieth century with the invention of psychoanalysis and the notion of transference made by Sigmund Freud and now with the use of new technologies to find a partner. In this regard, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (2003), in the comment he makes on the *Banquet* in his seminar on *Transference*, pointed out that an effect of this dialogue is what is called the *agalma*, which is the treasure that is not seen. The *agalma* is an object that generates charm, and for Lacan, this is the product of the effect of significance in the object, it melts its value of being something false and above all, it generates a fashion and fascination. And exactly as it happens now with selfies, blogs, YouTube channels or Facebook profiles, Instagram, Tik Tok. Each epoch has its *Ars amandi* (art of loving) that exposes and develops the conditions in which love is said and acted. In the classical era we found Ovid, in the romantic Stendhal; and nowadays dating apps like Tinder. These conditions lead us to raise a series of questions: how does this new digital reality affect the subjectivity of individuals in the twenty-first century?, what kind of desire and love does cyberspace drive in us?, how is the symptomatic use we have with new technologies? To address these questions, I will highlight four axes that I consider crucial for the analysis of the digitization of Eros, and that are: the digitization of affective life, sexual capital, the new writing of Eros and the symptomatic uses of new technologies.

The digitalization of affective life

That communication and information technologies are modifying our lives on the physical, intellectual and emotional plane, is a statement that has become one of the most recurrent of our time, and therefore, perhaps it is the one we have to suspect the most. Not because it is a false, unfounded claim or part of the neophobias that arise when we access a technological advance — as happened with Gutenberg's printing press, photography, phonograph, Heisenberg theory and now the internet — but because it perhaps does not explain anything to us. On the level of love and sex, effectively mobile devices, applications and digital social



networks, have become a means that replaces the urban territories of ritual pleasure where eros had its place (parks, discos, bars). Eros has moved to the tactility of the screens, taking electrical, digital properties and above all, becoming a spectacle. Regarding the digital space, Byung-Chul Han (2014) points out that "The digital word refers to the finger(*digits*), which first and foremost counts. Digital culture rests on the fingers that count. History, on the other hand, is narration. She doesn't count" (p.60). At the moment the speaking beings seduce, love each other, get excited, fight and even have their breakups through digital writing. And this is so, because the digital space has become for many people, a more comfortable, light and palliative place, than the one they find in everyday reality. Digitalization has the property of reducing resistance and disappearing what we perceive as negative. In the palliative society we have become, as Han (Byung-Chul, 2021) points out, "Digitalization is an anesthesia" (p. 52). Indeed, the digital space gives us the illusion that painful otherness can disappear and be suppressed in love, keeping the other at the distance one wants. A risk-free, painless and comfortable eros is what digitalization promotes.

Sexual capital

To approach the question of digital Eros, I want to return to an approach recently introduced by two sociologists. Illouz and Kaplan (2020) speak of sexual capital, to refer to "the ability of some subjects to increase personal value and obtain economic benefits from their own sexual abilities" (p.65). It turns out that, in late modernity, as the sphere of production becomes subsumed under the accumulation of capital, sexual capital becomes a way to summon, represent, exhibit, and actualize sexual subjectivity in a way that maximizes personal value. What sociologists argue is that their sexual capital approach:

[...] it no longer regards sex and sexuality as the hidden core of an authentic self. Rather, sex and sexuality have become measurable and objectified as lifestyle and identity choices, as improbable skills and techniques, as modes of personal communication, pathways to well-being, and evidence of overt creativity, experience, and uniqueness (pp. 60-61).



However, his approach to sexual capital does not imply that it is a rationalized act, where sex functions as an individualistic capital to satisfy individual interests, but that sexual capital would serve as a resource to gain an advantage in increasingly competitive labor markets (p. 73). In the case of selfies, they are a way in which we put into operation our sexual capital and narcissism, to turn our love intimacy into a spectacle. Spanish psychoanalyst José Ubieta (2019) notes:

The success of selfies – as well as tattoos – tells us about that permanent search for the brand in the other, in this case via image. Of the passion to see, before the uncertainty of the nomination of the being. Stable identities are replaced by temporary, serial identities. This insistent search does not exclude the beyond the principle of pleasure, hence the risk of its realization that sometimes implies the disappearance itself, which makes passion rather a tyranny (p.116).

This passion for images and the contemplation of screens speaks to us of an alienation with the digital Other, which can be in some cases quite imperative, persecutory and atrocious. In the eagerness to get more notifications, *likes* and messages, some young people have reached extreme behaviors: from operating on their teeth, face or breasts with the aim of appearing better in photos, to those who have lost their lives by taking a selfie in situations at risk (balconies and rooftops of buildings, high-speed cars)¹. There is no doubt that Freud's (1914) notion of narcissism is indispensable for understanding the function of the selfie in our digital age, since it turns out to be a structural component of the psychic apparatus, mainly in what is the formation of the self. Han (Byung-Chul, 2021) states that "The palliative society is also a society of 'likes'. He is the victim of a delirium of complacency. Everything is smoothed and polished until it is pleasant. The *like* is the sign and also the *analgesic of the present*" (p. 14). Regarding the way in which the Self feeds on the narcissistic cult in the digital space, Gustavo Dessal (2019) mentions:

¹ <https://www.milenio.com/virales/mujer-cae-de-edificio-por-intentar-tomarse-una-selfie>



The possibility of becoming the protagonist of a series without any plot, which does not require production expenses and that only allows to achieve in many cases a considerable audience but also a flow of money, is something too tempting for the self. (p.188).

Indeed, this is something that we can verify with the massive appearance of *bloggers*, *youtubers* and *influencers*, who generate an economy from their photos, videos and opinions that they issue every day.

The New Writing of Eros

Eloy Fernández Porta (2010), has suggested a new writing of Eros, which would be "€@0\$" (p.9). Fernández Porta explains that the proposal to write Eros with these acronyms is because they "make up the conceptual, discursive and material sequence that takes place in contemporary relationships, whether passionate or friendly, whether erotic or just affectionate"(p.9).

The sign of the euro currency represents the historical moment where the relations of production occur, which is the hyper-consumerist world (p.9). The second acronym, which is the trademark represents a distinctive subject, the protagonist of that hyper-consumerist world, where individuality is reformulated as marketing, understood as an expression of the self and as an emotional and advertising search for the Other (p. 10). The third which is the number zero, which is the presence of a value opposed to the financial values. That value is psychological, sensitive, spiritual, and above all, affective. Zero is also a hollow, a redondel around the vacuum. That emptiness is what we know as intimacy. Without that gap there is no dollar, euro, or trademarks. Without it there are no emotional transfers, no senses, no sense (pp. 10-11). And the fourth, the dollar sign, is not only the variant of the first, but, within that dynamic, represents its transferential, interchangeable or relational dimension. As Fernández Porta states "In the same way, affective relationships happen under the sign of transference, of exchange: translation of values, financial and sensitive from one value system to another"(p.11). This new writing of Eros, is very similar to what Freud (1900)



called as condensation in the work of the dream. Condensation is the mechanism by which an unconscious representation concentrates the elements of a number of other representations. And since the dream is a *Bilderschrift*, a writing by images, these should not be read for their image value, but should be taken one by one, in what Freud calls *Zeichenbeziehung*, that is, some relationships of signs. In that sense, the writing of €®0\$, counts what is sexual capital and emotions, as commodities that dominate capitalist societies of our day.

Symptomatic uses of new technologies

Eros digital leads us to a fiction of succumbing to the seduction of an erotic totally under control, which can be technically optimized. An eroticism *pret à porter*, to the taste of the consumer, personalized, moldable and programmed to the measure of each one. When I speak of a digitized Eros, it implies that it has become the language of capital, that is, the language of performance, accounting and efficiency. Paula Sibilia (2012) points out that new technologies impose an instant subjectivity, where blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, Sanpchat, Tinder, and Youtube profiles, serve as multicolored "Pompeii that follow one after another, where you see a sequence of episodes of everyday life and supposed intimacy, all related in the present time of the first person of the singular" (p. 162). The new digital reality offers this possibility of being reborn and reinventing itself, not only in another more attractive and updated graphic design, but with different profiles. The digitization of eros leads to a massive production of images and content, and that, from the use of new technologies, has generated the commercialization of online sex. The case of the subscription service Onlyfans, is an example of the commercialization of a self that is publicly sexual and that serves for the commodification of bodies and sex. From these conditions, we see more and more configured, a sexual subjectivity determined by the logic of market relations. The moment individuals must choose what they are, do and want sexually, they will be transformed into a new product, marketed and available to buy. In this regard, it is increasingly common that in analytical practice, that we listen to the vicissitudes of this digital erotica, which is under the



coordinates of sexual capital, where subjects think about their intimate life from the criteria of the market and certain ideals. Which brings us to the next question, is it possible to chain eroticism in that way as the digital Other makes us believe? Precisely the symptoms in erotica show us that it is not possible, there is always a fracture. What the symptoms attest is that all efforts to digitize Eros fail, in the digital space we also find that sexual relationship that Lacan declared non-existent. Precisely in the question of love ties in the digital world the encounter with the object demanded is impossible. Dessal (2019) states:

What is worth noting is that technology applied to love and sexual life introduces, among other things, a variant whose effects are visible. I refer to the fact that the possibility of subjecting the search for the *partenaire* to a filtering procedure more or less similar to that of any *online* sale product (color, size, year of manufacture, weight, price, etc.) allows to feed the fantasy of "manufacturing" someone to the measure of our dreams, of finding the ideal complement, a being that will not disappoint us. Although there is nothing reliable on the statistical level, psychoanalysis has discovered something whose consequences are decisive in that they reveal and explain a fundamental part of human peculiarities in matters of love and sex. Regardless of the course of a loving and sexual encounter, the date is always unsuccessful. It is even in the happiest cases, those in which lasting harmony seems to have been achieved. The appointment is always unsuccessful because between the subject and the object of his choice there is an inevitable fracture, an insurmountable inadequacy. No object is capable of completely restoring the myth of paradise lost (pp. 36-37).

Even with the instant messaging provided by WhatsApp, Telegram or Twitter applications, users can choose the option to hide their online status or if they have read the messages. This frustrates the expectation of the immediate, which often causes offense, arguments or the degradation of love life. But perhaps, what most highlights the symptom of digital Eros, is that the human being cannot and could not support its existence without the support of artifacts, devices or applications. The new digital reality is also a place where sexual



intercourse is missing, and that is precisely what you want to expel in the use of new technologies for love life.

Digital reality leaves little room for lack, as it operates on constantly covering it, throwing the subject into an infinite hypertext of the global screen. If what triumphs today is a digitized eros, it is because of the erotic functionality of devices and information technologies. A functionality that would not be possible to understand beyond its consumption, without the elements that psychoanalysis gives us in the way in which new technologies touch the impulsive springs and the devices of enjoyment of the speaking being. And it is that information societies have an essential function for the libidinal economy of the subject, since this is the subjective basis on which the voracious machinery that moves the system of production and consumption works.

Epilogue: What place for the symptom?

Since its inception, psychoanalysis has been linked to the question of the meaning of the symptoms, the reason for their insistence and their status. That in the digital eros the symptom appears, tells us that something is wrong in the application of new technologies to love life. Lacan (2009) defined the symptom as the return of truth in the failures of knowledge. Now, the analytical symptom is made of signifiers, and to place the symptom as truth from knowledge, it must be established in the significant chain. That is, the symptom is an effect of significance, it is an effect of language. The new digital reality presents us with new symptom languages. The question that arises is: what place for the symptom other than that of classification, programming and marketing? In the analytical exercise we will try to collect the symptom in its unrepeatable and peculiar not-all. As Allouch (2015) points out following an elaboration of Lacan, what analytical experience attests, is that we have to deal with "untamed truths", in which one of them would be that of "there is no sexual relationship", and the others are those of there "is no Other of the Other" and there "is no enjoyment of the Other" (p. 124). A frank analysis would be another way of dealing with these three confluent ways of non-existence, where the subject learns to live with the fundamental impossibilities that mark his loving dimension.



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