

The Radicallry of Love

Srecko Horvat

Copyright © Srećko Horvat 2016

The right of Srećko Horvat to be identified as Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2016 by Polity Press

Polity Press 65 Bridge Street Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press 350 Main Street Malden, MA 02148, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-9114-5 ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-9115-2(pb)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Horvat, Srecko. The radicality of love / Srecko Horvat. pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-7456-9114-5 (hardback) — ISBN 978-0-7456-9115-2 (pbk.)
1. Communism and love. 2. Communism and sex. 3. Love--Political aspects.
4. Radicalism. 5. Revolutions. I. Title.

HX550.L73H67 2015 128'.46-dc23 2015014785

Typeset in 12.5 on 15 pt Adobe Garamond by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire Printed and bound in the UK by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: politybooks.com

The Radicality of Love

Theory Redux

Series editor: Laurent de Sutter

Published Titles Roberto Esposito, *Persons and Things* Srećko Horvat, *The Radicality of Love* Dominic Pettman, *Infinite Distraction* Meet me in Taksim tonight a drink and a kiss what in the world could be more civilized? Chinawoman, "Kiss in Taksim Square" (2013)

Contents

Foreplay: To Fall in Love, or Revolution

ı.	Love in the Age of Cold Intimacies Rimbaud's reinvention of love · "Fuck bodies" · Nymphomaniac · Grindr & Tinder · Ideology of transparency · Rimbaud again?	23
2.	Desire in Tehran: What Are the Iranians Dreaming Of? The prohibition of desire Khomeini's Revolution · Wet dreams of the regime · Nineteen Eighty-Four · Iranian nouveau riche · H. · The meaning of real freedom	41

CONTENTS

3. Libidinal Economy of the October Revolution Sexual revolution · Sexual counterrevolution · Lenin's troubles · The prohibition of love · "Free love" and "careless kisses" · Appassionata or Revolution?	76
4. The Temptation of Che Guevara:	
Love or Revolution?	108
Killing machine vs. Loving machine ·	100
Che & Aleida · Revolution based on	
love · Communism for two · Madness	
in love, reason in madness · Renewed	
caress of bullets	
caress of bullets	
5. "What Do I Care about Vietnam, if I	
Have Orgasm Problems?"	126
The test of '68 · Kommune 1 · Rudi	
Dutschke vs. "free love" · Das Wilde	
Leben · The man as weapon · "Smash	
the monogamy!" · Lenin again?	
Afterplay: The Radicality of Love	147
Notes	165
7.7.77	

Foreplay: To Fall in Love, or Revolution

Each attempt to speak or even write about love is inevitably linked to a profound difficulty, to an anxiety: words are always insufficient. However, even if our attempt resembles a jump into dark water, we should dare to talk about love, with all the risks involved. We should try again, fail again, fail better. The necessity for this book is to be found in the following consideration: that the lover's discourse is still, like 40 years ago when Roland Barthes famously uttered this credo in his *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*, of an extreme solitude.

It shouldn't surprise us so much that love is missing in the hypersexualized universe of the West, but what is striking is that it has no real place (does love have a place at all, or is it always already an *a-topos*?) or important role in recent upheavals all around the world, from Tahrir Square to Taksim, from Zuccotti Park to Puerta del Sol, from Hong Kong to Sarajevo. The question of love is surprisingly missing. It is hidden in the margins, whispered in tents, performed in a dark corner of the street. There are, of course, kisses on Taksim Square and passionate affairs in Zuccotti Park, but love is not the issue of serious debate. This book – sadly aware that it is only a small step in a long journey in front of us; that it is maybe only a foreplay – has to be seen as a risky contribution to this missing topic.

This attempt towards the possible meaning of radicality of love doesn't understand love in the vulgar materialistic sense of, let's say, the hippie explosion, or the "sexual revolution" of '68 that was, unfortunately, in the end primarily reduced to commodified desire, or the postmodern permissiveness where "anything goes!" It goes, or at least tries to reach, much beyond it, embarking from the following dock: it is not only enough to be true to your desire and ready to follow it until the end – Lacan's famous dictum: *ne pas céder sur son desir* ("Do not give up on your desire"); what

is needed is a Duty to reinvent it from the very beginning each time over. Rimbaud's famous credo that "love has to be reinvented" is the best recapitulation of this revolutionary duty.

It is wonderfully captured in one of the most beautiful instances of the fight against habit ever conducted, in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*:

Let the thunder of a hundred cannon remind you three times daily to resist the force of habit. Like that powerful Eastern emperor, keep a slave who reminds you daily - keep hundreds. Have a friend who reminds you every time he sees you. Have a wife who, in love, reminds you early and late but be careful that all this also does not become a habit! For you can become accustomed to hearing the thunder of a hundred cannon so that you can sit at the table and hear the most trivial, insignificant things far more clearly than the thunder of the hundred cannon - which you have become accustomed to hearing. And you can become so accustomed to having a hundred slaves remind you every day that you no longer hear, because through habit you have acquired the ear which hears and still does not hear.1

The worst thing that can happen to love is habit. Love is – if it is really love – a form of eternal dynamism and at the same time fidelity to the first encounter. It is a tension, or better, a sort of dialectics: between dynamism (this constant re-invention) and fidelity (to this fatal and unexpected *crack in the world*). The same holds for Revolution. The moment when a revolution stops to reinvent, not only social and human relations, but stops reinventing its own presuppositions, we usually end up in a *re-action*, in a regression.

A truly revolutionary moment is like love; it is a crack in the world, in the usual running of things, in the dust that is layered all over in order to prevent anything New. It is a moment when air becomes thick and at the same time you can breathe more than ever. But remember Kierkegaard: when you get accustomed to hearing the thunder of a hundred cannon so that you can sit oblivious at the table, you know the revolution is at stake and the moment of counter-revolution lurks behind the thunder. The moment when you get used to the thunder of the hundred cannon, the truth of the event disappears. This is the reason why all these superficial classifications

("Arab Spring," "Occupy Movement," "New Left," etc.), which evolved from the eternal drive of people to alienate things by definitions, are dangerously misleading and become untrue to the original event, or: a desire (not from the past, but) from the future.

There is no such thing as the Arab Spring. There is no such thing as the Occupy Movement. Yes, they all share inherent characteristics (from the form of organization to most of the goals), and we are currently witnessing a specific political sequence that might bring tremendous changes (or end up in a total fiasco), but to identify them, to reduce them to the same denominator, always carries the danger of falling into the trap of simplification: to define is to limit (it is a *limes*), by definition. Of course, all these events are connected in a deeper sense. But each of this events, as much as they are part of the same sequence or pattern, carries something New.

To perceive this New, one can't say Syntagma or Puerta del Sol are the same. There is, as said, a pattern. There is, of course, a very specific historical context (from the upheavals of 2011 to the new left parties such as Syriza or Podemos) in which such revolutionary potentials occur.

But what connects them, more than anything, is something that can't be reduced to pure facts. What can't be reduced is this feeling of presence beyond classification or definitions; a presence of submergence; the feeling that you are completely alone but not abandoned, that you are more alone and unique than ever before, but more connected with a multitude than ever as well, in the very same moment. And this feeling can be described as Love. Revolution is love if it wants to be worthy of its name.

Just take the miracle that happened at Tahrir Square when Christians had put their own lives at risk protecting Muslims praying amid violence between protesters and Mubarak's supporters. They formed a "human chain" around those praying to protect them. This was – and still is – one of the most remarkable scenes from the so-called "Arab Spring"; this moment of unity, courage and ... discipline. Wasn't that mad in the eyes of the regime? But, at the same time, wasn't that pure reason in the middle of madness? Or as Hegel would say it à propos Napoleon, wasn't that the "world spirit on horseback," the Godot we were waiting for in our dark times?

Something similar happened during the Iranian

Revolution. When Khomeini in March 1979 ordered women to wear the *chador*, hundreds of feminists started to gather in the courtyard of Tehran University and during the following five days of demonstrations tens of thousands protested against the veil. Then a Tahrir-like event happened: the women were surrounded by the newly formed "Party of God" (Hezbollah) and, in order to protect them, men – friends, lovers, brothers – made a circle around them.

This is a sign of love. And, again, it is Kierkegaard who still provides us with the best explanation of this event: one must believe in love, otherwise one will never become aware that it exists. The same goes for revolution. But why a sign? Because it is still not love. It is solidarity. Every act of solidarity contains love, it is a sort of love, but love can't be reduced to solidarity. Take charity as opposed to solidarity. Usually it contains some sort of distance: if you, for instance, come across a beggar and give him a dollar or bread, this is not yet solidarity. Even if you organize a huge charity campaign, open an account for donations, etc., this is not yet solidarity. Solidarity is something much more than mercy: usually when you appease your conscience (donate money

to starving children in Africa, to use the usual Starbucks example), you can go on with your daily life as if nothing really happened. However, once you are enacting solidarity you can even abstain from charity or mercy: even if you don't give a dollar to every beggar, you can't go on with your daily life as if nothing really happened. Why? Because you carry him in your life; you live with him not like with some "integrated reject" (as we live with immigrants or refugees today), but he is a part and even a presupposition for your very action: he can never be fully integrated, because injustice can't be integrated in acts of love. This is why solidarity already contains love. In this respect, forming protective human rings around Muslims, Jews or women is a beautiful instance of solidarity, but to arrive at love one must go a step further. To love would mean to do it even when there is no event, no special occasion, or level of consciousness. That would be the true event: when love is not (only) provoked by extraordinary cracks in the world, but can be found in the seemingly boring daily activities, even repetitions, or - reinventions.

Although our present historical deadlock, with all the "autumns" that came after "springs," is darker than ever, it is the fidelity to this possible future (Muslims and Christians fighting together in Egypt, women and men in Iran, etc.) that defines the true revolutionary commitment. The time always comes when the shining path becomes covered with dust, when enthusiasm turns into the worst sort of depression (or what Walter Benjamin would call "left-wing melancholy"), when a counterrevolution swallows the last emancipatory potentials of a revolutionary moment, but the biggest defeat would be to sink into this: not to be defeated by the brutal reality after another defeat, but to be defeated by the abandonment of the utopian desire. Here we should paraphrase Mao, who in his famous quote says that a revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, but an insurrection and act of violence by which one class overthrows another. Today we should say the following: Revolution is not a one-night stand, nor is it a flirt. These are the easiest things to do. If you perceive revolution like that you might easily find yourself waking up after crazy sex the next morning just to find a foreign body in your bed. Yesterday it was the most beautiful and sensual lover, now it is just a (fucked)