Novos estud. - CEBRAP vol.1 no.se São Paulo 2005

EASY LOVING

Romanticism and consumerism in late modernity

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Summary

This article discusses the relations between the economy and love in contemporary complex societies. The author recovers an interpretation of romantic love as a private form of communication that makes lovers stand out in and from their surroundings. In this sense, what defines amorous interaction is not the consumption of romantic rituals, as suggested by cultural studies, but the singular sense that lovers attribute to their own relationships and shared activities.

Keywords: amorous relationships; love and capitalism; late modernity; critical theory.

Tensions between a supposedly "true love", moved by noble ideas and sublime feeling, and a "selfish love", based upon the self-centered motivations of both parties, are not only inspiration for paperback love stories and self-help books. The theme has also been a subject for discussion in the social sciences since the early 20th Century at the very least. However, what is of interest are not the sentimental plots in which the lovers live out their pleasures, self-deceptions and illusions, but the logics and patterns of behavior that preside, or ought to preside, over the different social spheres. Thus, in the social sciences, the frictions between true love and selfish love take the form of tensions between the instrumental logic that guides the economic or political spheres and the nature of amorous relationships.

For most of the specialized bibliography, the clash between instrumental interests and amorous relationships is driven to paroxysm in late modernity, generally understood here as contemporary modern societies characterized by an unprecedented compression of time and space under the weight of the rationalization, impersonalization and de-territorialization of social relations, and, from the point of view of the individual, by a radicalization of the principle of personal responsibility for one's own present and future. As such, while the traditional communities -- the extended family, place of birth, etc – are rarefied, the modern collective references -- the nuclear family, the labor union, the nation etc. – find themselves bereft of any capacity to reconstruct the bonds of closeness and solidarity undone by modernization.

In this context, the individual assumes for himself the burden of processing the vast array of pressures that fall into his lap without the slightest deflection. Not only is the individual expected to be socially and professionally competent, but must also be endowed with a level of intellectual and aesthetic culture that sets him apart within his social group. It is against the backdrop of these constraints that we idealize and build our amorous relationships, and this raises the question as to whether or not it is actually possible to reconcile such clearly divergent logics of action and standards of social relations as those that govern the private sphere with the functional systems of late

modernity. While impersonal, means-to-an-end relationships prevail in the market, where what counts are one's qualifications, technical performance and bank balance and where the most highly valued individual traits are discipline, the ability to follow learned rules and behavioral predictability, the opposite should supposedly hold true for our amorous relationships, where spontaneity, unpredictability and disregard for rules and conventions are more highly prized. Moreover, if the market measures people against generalized criteria that effectively make them interchangeable, the selection criteria applied in amorous relationships are subjective and inaccessible to cognition, which makes the loved-one irreplaceable in the eyes of the lover.

In the debate within the social sciences, the distinct natures of the market and romantic love have traditionally been seen as antinomic and irreconcilable. In this discussion, special attention has been given to the increasingly more market-like character of the contexts in which romantic love is lived and idealized. The question that arises is whether romantic love, which emerged in modern social history as the last shelter of coziness and spontaneity, of altruistic commitment and the suspension of instrumental relationships, can survive the unfettered and unmitigated capitalist commercialization of the social and recreational spaces in which amorous experiences are lived.

This debate thrived within critical theory and has recently been revived through interaction between the "third generation" of the Frankfurt School and cultural studies. A reflection of this dialogue can be seen in the work of the sociologist Eva Illouz, from the University of Jerusalem, which has been welcomed and debated with enthusiasm by the contemporary critical theorists. Eva Illouz's book *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, published in 1997, in which she analyzes the transformations of romantic love in the United States throughout the 20th Century, received the American Sociological Association's Outstanding Contribution award and was translated into German and published by the Institut für Sozialforschung (Social Research Institute) in 2003, with a preface by its director, Axel Honneth 2. The debate with the author has continued in seminars and colloquies, and recently merited a special edition of the WestEnd journal, the Institute's new periodical.

The author's work seeks to emphasize the complementarity between romantic love and the market in late modernity. Her thesis is that the commercialization of romantic contexts neither harms subjectivity nor results in social pathologies. Quite the contrary, for Illouz, romantic love and capitalism make a good match. According to the author, the widespread consumption of amorous rituals constitutes the core of contemporary romantic love, reinvigorating capitalism and lovers alike.

With systems theory as its point of departure, more specifically the canonic work on the subject, *Love as Passion* by Niklas Luhmann 3, this article aims to recover the tensions between romantic love and the market. As will be explained in detail further on, what interests us in system theory's treatment of love is not the history of the constitution of the semantics of love in Europe, as described by Luhmann, but a sub-product of the author's inquiries, principally his description of romantic communication, which is presented here as a micro-sociology of amorous interaction 4. As such, the article initially takes a conceptual approach to the different dimensions of romantic love and then goes on to reconstruct the debate between cultural studies and critical theory before finally developing the abovementioned micro-sociological argument with a view to redrawing and qualifying the borders between romantic love and the market.

Dimensions of romantic love

No adequate definition of romantic love can be found in the bibliography of contemporary sociology. This is partially due to the fact that the cognitive-normative orientation - the concern with rationality and order – predominant in the social sciences in the postwar period relegated the emotions and love to themes of only secondary importance. It was only from the eighties that the theme was returned to and reconstructed as a truly relevant sociological question 5. Even so, when it comes specifically to love, the bibliography still tends to highlight aspects of social history and the history of ideas.

This contrasts starkly with the works of the founders of sociology, who were intent on never losing sight of the multidimensionality of love. Max Weber, for example, emphasizes the "mortal

seriousness of sexual love", which he believed runs counter to everything objective, rational and generalizable "in the most radical way" 6. In ampler and more consistent fashion, Georg Simmel sought to study "sexual love" as a "primary unjustified category" that takes on varied forms of historical and individual construction 7. Taking this idea as his base, the author produced a vast range of studies about love and amorous relationships that have kept their relevance over time 8.

To hint at the analytical amplitude intrinsic to the subject, I would like to define romantic love here as a historical-cultural model that branches into (at least) five dimensions, as outlined below:

In the *field of the emotions* romantic love expresses itself in what Dux fittingly describes as "a bond with the other that knows no more ardent desire than the yearning to lead one's own life in the body of the loved one" 9. It should be stated that "emotion" is not referred to here as a pre-cultural constant or mere neurophysiological manifestation10, but as a phenomenon at the interface between body and culture and thus reflecting cultural legacies, individual personality traits and the determinants of a specific social context 11.

As an *idealization*, romantic love promises the individual full recognition of his or her singularity, in all of its dimensions, peculiarities and personal idiosyncrasies. For this reason, romantic love can vindicate and absorb people so entirely that it renders other references within the social context unimportant 12. The process of the historical constitution of the western romantic ideal has been well studied and documented in the bibliography 13. In such reconstructions, romantic love appears as a synthesis of spiritual and sensual ideals of love, fusing, on the one hand, platonic love, Christian mysticism and courtly love and, on the other, an *ars erotica*, Renaissance hedonism and gallantry 14. In contemporary societies, "the romantic ideal", in spite of losing its plausibility, is still enormously important" 15, still constitutes a relevant source of reference for individual choice and behavior.

As a *relationship model*, romantic love historically combines a fusion of sexual passion and emotional affection, of marriage and love, and, frequently, plans for building a family16.

As a *cultural practice*, romantic love corresponds to a repertoire of discourses, actions and rituals by means of which amorous emotions - respecting cultural differences - are evoked, perceived, transmitted and intensified 17.

On the subject of *social interactions*, romantic love corresponds to a radicalized form of what Luhmann described as "interpersonal interpenetration": an interaction that stands out from the anonymous social context, leading lovers to take recourse to models of meaning and interpretation and to communicative symbols so diverse that they often appear hermetic to those outside the relationship 18.

From incompatibility to symbiosis

In her evaluation of how love has been dealt with by critical theory, Eva Illouz shows that the diagnostics of the age developed by this school repeatedly stress that the proliferation in the supply and mass consumption of amorous rituals is a symptom of modern social pathologies. From a normative point of view, the author claims that the different generations of the Frankfurt School have sought to underline the need to protect amorous relationships from utilitarian-economic logic.

Formulated in such a general way, Illouz's interpretation effectively provides a summary of the general tone of the Frankfurt School's cultural criticism at different times. In *Minima Moralia*, 1951, Adorno expresses skepticism about love in a world ruled by utilitarianism: "To love means being able to prevent spontaneity from being snatched away by the omnipresent influence of the economy; love transmits itself through such loyalty" 19. A few years later Marcuse would also turn against the commercialization and 'technization' of romantic fantasies, which he felt would lead to the production of pseudo needs and the obliteration of all emancipating possibilities. For Marcuse, the commercialization of love could only restrain individual freedom; the great romantic dream-maker in capitalism would not be Eros, but Thanatos 20.

Unlike Marcuse, Erich Fromm did not believe there were any insurmountable structural barriers to a "non-pathological" amorous relationship in capitalist societies: for Fromm, the "art of love" can be learned by anyone who engages it with determination and tenacity. On the other hand, the author's diagnosis does suggest that the universe of amorous relationships in capitalist society has been taken over by utilitarian and market interests opposed to the logic of love. As such, in order to truly experience love, the "deepest and most real need of any human being", people have to win back their autonomy:

> *Human beings are motivated by mass suggestion; intended to entice increasing mass consumption as an objective in itself. All actions are subordinated to these economic goals, the means become the end; man is a well-dressed and well-fed robot[...]. If the human being wants to be capable of love, he needs to look at himself first. The economic apparatus should serve him, not the other way round* 21.

Habermas' vast oeuvre does not resolve Critical Theory's difficulty in learning the relations between love and the market analytically (and, it is worth stating, off the moral record). Strictly speaking, Habermas rarely refers to the issue. Not even the essay in which he delves into the work of George Bataille is an exception, as there is no reference to either love or eroticism 22. In any sense, it must be stressed that amorous communication cannot be fully understood from the perspective of the theory of communicative action. After all, it is undoubtedly a form of communication accustomed to the life-world, but it cannot be treated as a communicative form geared towards understanding, as one would conclude from the theory. As we shall see later, romantic communication does not pursue agreement or understanding: quite the opposite, it seeks to highlight individual singularities.

Although Habermas does not deal with this issue directly, the application of his theory to the discussion of the relationship between the market and love confirms the diagnosis of the first generation of the Frankfurt School. Thus, were we to start off from the model of a two-tiered society postulated by Habermas – comprising the sphere of the systems and the life-world - we would be led to conclude that when romantic stimuli made with commercial proposes infiltrate the daily life of lovers it causes an undesired colonization of the life-world, thus reaffirming the irreducible contradiction between the economy and love.

Aiming to promote dialogue between cultural studies and the critical tradition, Eva Illouz recovers the various connections between the capitalist market and romantic love and claims that there is no contradiction between them, but rather a perfect symbiosis 23. Essentially, the author argues that romantic love is the last wellspring of the utopias of transformation and rupture of the quotidian order so essential to the symbolic and material reproduction of capitalism. For Illouz, lovers see themselves as seized by an enormous creative and transformative power, one that makes the lover feel like a revolutionary who must break free of normality to live, alongside the loved-one, experiences that slip the scale of the established order. Nevertheless, from the political perspective, the lovers' revolution is a lame effort, as the supposed rupture with normality merely projects them into the universe of offers and possibilities of romantic consumption. As such, the intended rupture with the order experienced by the lovers represents nothing more than a migration between spheres of sociability: they abandon routine life in order to immerse themselves in a magic world of romantic consumption. However, both of these spheres are governed by the same capitalist regime for the production and distribution of goods and services.

Based on a historical-empirical study of the development of romantic love in the United States, Illouz identifies at least three major interfaces that ensure the convergence between the production and circulation of goods and services and romantic love in late modernity.

The first connection is established by the creation and diffusion of cultural meanings associated with romantic love. The physical excitement a person feels when attracted to somebody is decoded as love based on the available cultural repertoire, materialized in values and a network of meanings, but also in a material collection of images, products, books, works of art etc. This set of references allows us to recognize, interpret and evaluate the essence and intensity of the stimulation felt. After all, it is important to ascertain whether this feeling is a fleeting passion or something that will turn the lovers' lives inside out. This cultural baggage also guides the lover in the face of signs that can help interpret the loved one's behavior, so as to verify whether or not the love is requited. They also

guide the lover's own behavior in such a way as he modulates his speech and gestures so as to convey his feelings to the other while also indicating, through a code that does not spoil the moment, but is nonetheless crystal clear and impossible to misunderstand, the true nature of the amorous desire; whether it is something that suggests the itineraries of a shared life or promises only a few moments of pleasure.

If, at the advent of romantic love, literary compositions were responsible for furnishing lovers with their models of communication and expected behavior, according to Illouz this role is fulfilled in late modernity by the cultural industry and advertising. In order to make her point, the author first examines magazines targeting different readerships in 1920's United States and uses the material to show how advertising, films and the leisure industry set about weaving romantic plotlines that associated love with existential fulfillment and personal success. The contemporary period, on the other hand, is analyzed from a set of interviews with people from diverse social backgrounds that likewise reveal that their cognitive definitions of romantic situations hark back to a learning process mediated by the mass media.

Among the more highly schooled interviewees, the author identifies a certain critical capacity in their assimilation of the romantic images conveyed in the mass media and the products of the cultural industry. For these people, such images are part of a certain primary reality that lovers consciously imitate in a self-effacing fashion. Note that, as the author herself puts it, this trend has already been evidenced by Umberto Echo, when he said that love-talk between people with some level of intellectual culture becomes literary quotation:

> *The postmodern attitude seems to be similar to when a man loves an intelligent and experienced woman and knows therefore that he cannot say: "I love you deeply", since he knows that she knows (and she knows that he knows) that these same words have already been written, say, by Liala 24. Yet, there is a way out. He could say: "As Liala would say, I love you deeply". At this moment, having avoided fake innocence, after saying that one cannot use words naïvely; he ends up saying what he wanted to say, that he loves her, but at a time in which innocence has been lost 25*.

The second intersection Illouz identifies between the market and love lies in the development, over the course of the 20th Century, of a public space in which the amorous plot could unfold. In the United States this comes in the form of the institution of "dating", that intimate meeting that liberates love from the suffocating domain of family and frees fawning couples to live out their romantic emotions in the new commercial settings of leisure: the darkness of a movie theater, a bar, over a candlelit dinner, etc. More recently, lovers have been armed with new scripts and stage-sets with which to enact their romantic tale: a car ride, a trip to the beach or even a short vacation in Europe. However, it is not only the young couples that avail of these romantic plotlines and settings in order to enjoy those first encounters. Mature couples in steady relationships also look to industrial romantic rituals for a miracle that can re-enflame the amorous fantasies doused by the rigors of the marital routine 26.

To describe situations charged with romantic emotion, Illouz appeals to Victor Turner's anthropology of religion, and more specifically to the description of religious rituals that culminate in a liminality. According to the author, romantic love also has its liminal rituals, which break the daily orders and hierarchies, transporting the lovers, through the consumption of goods and services labeled romantic, into a fantastic world in which ordinary annoyances, their own limitations and, with a little luck, even the loved-one's most objectionable caprices, are temporarily interrupted. The relation between romantic love and the market of goods and services for lovers takes a paradoxical but not contradictory shape: in a bid to "escape" from boring normality through romantic rituals, lovers end up turning to exactly what they do every day in capitalist society anyway, namely the consumption of goods and services; thus reconciling the romantic ideal, characterized as it is by the desire for transcendence, with the triviality of commercial transactions:

> *The notion of ritual is the link between goods and symbols mass-marketed symbols, and the subjective feelings of pleasure, creativity, freedom and withdrawal from comodity exchange. This in turn implies that there is no simple dichotomy between the realm of intersubjective relationships and the sphere of consumption,* ***for the meanings***

that maintain the "life-world" of romance are constructed within, rather than outside, the capitalist system *27*.

The third point of contact Illouz identifies between economic calculation and romantic love lies within the scope of love-related choices. Despite the fairy tales about a love that goes beyond any social or physical boundaries, statistics show, according to the author, that having similar cultural capital is a *sine qua non* of an amorous commitment. Contrary to its own self-representation, therefore, romantic love is socially endogamic. 28

Studies like Illouz's, which try to show and interpret cultural practices associated with romantic love, can effectively refresh critical theory's reflection on the subject, as the author expects, so long as they reconcile intellectual reflection and cultural criticism with the concrete experiences of the actors. However, her analysis lacks something highly valued in sociology since at least Weber: the need to properly consider the meanings constructed and attributed to amorous interaction by the lovers themselves. In this sense, Illouz's analysis, which is extremely useful in describing the institutional dimensions of love in contemporary society (the objects and rituals involved), loses sight of what differentiates amorous relationships from all other social interactions, which is exactly the unique, singular and mythical meaning lovers attribute to the experience. By limiting herself to an external perspective on amorous relationships and defining love as a cultural practice, the author ends up confusing love with its rituals and failing to take into account how these rituals and objects are integrated into the relationship. In other words: while the market in fact offers goods that prepare the ground for the experience of romantic love and that may even have helped project romantic love as a modern means of experiencing the sacred, as Illouz suggests, the universe of the couple, as a forum for the construction of shared meanings, nevertheless remains resistant to the market.

First of all, the market cannot generate the energy of love. Put flatly, the market merely makes available to lovers a gamut of products tailored to facilitate and intensify amorous interaction, but it is powerless to engender the feeling in the lover's heart. The comparison with religion is a worthy one: the ultimate impulse for the enchantment of the amorous ritual does not stem from the presence of the trappings and contexts that surround it, but from the conviction, like that of the devotee who believes in a higher metaphysical force, that love exists and that the loving couple partake of it. After all, even the richest and most expressive of temples cannot make the agnostic feel close to God.

Another frontier between love and the market is the distinctive symbolic use that lovers make of products associated with romantic love, as the meanings conferred upon the rituals will always be unique, even idiosyncratic, in any relationship. Compare, for example, two relationships that are very similar from a ritualistic point of view: two different couples that frequent similar places and exchange the same kinds of gifts will nonetheless establish entirely distinct relationships, as the meaning each couple attributes to their relationship will always be very particular.

The next section explores in detail this objection to Illouz's theory, so far formulated in a very generic way.

The code of love

The diagnosis conducted within the confines of systems theory points to a positive correlation between the multiplication of anonymous relations and the intensification of personal and intimate relationships in complex societies. This is explained by a deepening in the processes of functional differentiation that Luhmann claims leads societies "to better regulate the interdependences between different social relations, filtering the interferences more accurately." 30. Such differentiation represents a protection for intimate relationships, which become less vulnerable to the influences of tradition and other functional systems. Individuals, in turn, are no longer anchored to a single place in the social topography: they become socially rootless, free to assume different roles in distinct social subsystems, resulting in the vast array of combinations that shape individual characteristics. In this context, modern love develops as a code of communication capable of organizing the

exchange between two very exclusive people who manipulate two worlds of singular meanings, personalized in a very specific way. This is why love is so difficult in complex societies, or so unlikely, even if it still abounds - "a very normal improbability", as Luhmann puts it.

In amorous communication what matters is not the subject being discussed, but "the shared consideration of the same aspects", as this is the way the intimate sphere is formed, as opposed to "the anonymously constituted world " 31. Communication here is not to be confused with a verbal-rational exercise, as, for example, in couples therapies (which Luhmann always refers to with ironic disdain). The improbability threshold of intimate communication between two very different individuals is, in general, surpassed by non-discursive forms of communication, especially flirting, touching and conversations that renounce any kind of objective message:

> *Lovers can talk forever and say absolutely nothing. In other words, no communicative action, questions or requests are necessary to create syntony between the loved-one and the lover; merely experiencing the loved-one should be enough to spur the lover to action, without need of mediations. 32.*

Of course, this code of love does not represent for Luhmann a God-given gift or innate anthropologic skill: it is the result of a functional differentiation that has historically triggered passion as a specialized means of communication. Just as all social subsystems are governed by binary codes - for example, legal/illegal for the juridical system or true/false for science -, the subsystem of intimacy is likewise controlled by a dyadic codification: personal/impersonal. The existence of personal communication – especially that of love - defines the symbolic borders that separate or differentiate lovers from the rest of the world: for as long as they communicate personally, lovers build up their own symbolic world, wholly distinct from their anonymous, impersonal surroundings. The exclusively symbolic-expressive constitution of the love code makes it strongly binding, as it only applies to those who love, but it also renders it very fragile, as any misunderstanding can cause major tremors within the intimate subsystem.

The code of love penetrates specific relationships only contingently. For lovers, the presence of the code is perceived by lovers as an aleatory but unavoidable event. It is, therefore, – expressed in all the lyricism of Octavio Paz -- "the voluntary acceptance of an inevitability" 33. According to Luhmann, the essence of love as a communicative code that serves to affirm the differences between individuals in their singular relationships excludes the possibility of action motivated by either the expectation of reciprocity or the enjoyment of the feeling in and of itself. As such, in amorous interaction, this two-way interplay oriented by the lover's experience of the partner deactivates all sources of motivation not associated with the universe of that partner. The individual cannot hope to love by action, as the code of communication involved follows another rule: live your differences and guide your actions by the experience of the loved one. *Ipsis verbis*:

> *Love would be entirely misunderstood if taken as the reciprocity of actions towards mutual satisfaction or as an inclination to fulfill someone else's expectations. Love first leaves its mark upon the experiencing of the experience, and thus changes the world as the horizon of action and experience. Love is the internalization of the other's subjectively organized reference for the world; it therefore lends a special force of persuasion to what the other experiences or could possibly experience in things and events. Only after that does love motivate action. We are not concerned here with the real effects of such action, which is defined by and sought for its symbolic meaning and its ability to express love as the materialization of the peculiar nature of a world that we know, along with the lovers (and nobody else), to be a world formed of shared tastes, a shared history, shared deviations, the issues discussed and the analyzed results. What calls one to action is not the expected , but the non-naturalness of a conception of the world that is entirely attuned to the individuality of a particular person and that could only ever exist as such. When it comes to giving, what love says is: grant to others the right to give what they can give, being what they are 34.*

The idea that amorous interaction corresponds to an exclusive form of communication between very different individuals lodges important objections against Illouz's thesis of the relationship between the market and romantic love. On the one hand, we can agree with the author's affirmations that the cultural industry supplies the repertoire of models for amorous practices in late

modernity, that the entertainment industry provides the goods and services needed to enact the romantic rituals and that lovers choose partners from within their own social class. And we must also agree that that movies and other craftwork steeped in the romantic aura undeniably contribute to the development of the liturgy of love. Nevertheless, what defines the amorous relationship as such is not the consumption of these rituals, but the (unlikely) establishment of a personal communication that underlines and confirms individual differences. It is the existence of this specific form of communication -- the code of love – that shapes the lovers' special world, in which the romantic rituals and accessories acquire their real sense and concretize their amorous vocation. It is the activation of this special code, not the price of the dish chosen from the menu, that distinguishes one couple dining by candlelight in a French restaurant, though immersed in the liminal states of love, from another couple in the same restaurant, bathed in that same candle-lit glow, but who are not in love; who simply entertain each other.

Even the social endogamy evidenced by Illouz takes on another meaning when observed under the light of amorous interaction as a form of communication designed to affirm differences. Instead of simply representing instrumental action geared towards maintaining the status quo, it is perhaps an expression of the differentiations acquired by the semantic of love on the various social layers – a fact widely confirmed by Illouz's own empirical investigations 35.

Before presenting the conclusions, I still need to clarify a little more effectively the manner in which systems theory's interpretation of love is appropriated here. As already noted, we are not interested in the social history of love in Europe, but in describing the way lovers communicate in a singular social interaction. The evolution of the semantics of love, as defined by Luhmann, is pervaded with a historicism that dilutes its theoretical meaning, turning it into a Eurocentric discourse blind to the interweavings of modernity across the various regions of the world 36. Let me explain further.

The book *Love as Passion* is part of a research program in which Luhmann explores the transformations of political-historical semantics throughout the European transition to modernity. "Semantics" should be understood here not only as a set of symbols, but also as the social context in which those symbols acquire their meanings. From this point of view, the development of the semantics of love results from the differentiation of functional systems and involves complex processes of cultural transmission through literary production and reception that are, as described, proper and exclusive to western European societies. In other words, whoever draws the history of the development of the semantics of love as Luhmann describes it to its final conclusion will be obliged to give Western Europe precedence in the development of the "modern" semantics of love, thus relegating the rest of the world to the level of mere apprentices in an art invented by Europeans.

This perspective is contested by many intercultural comparisons 37, with special mention of the work of Charles Lindholm 38, who discovered love-passion formats in many non-western societies that come very close to the idea of romantic love. Unlike Luhmann, Lindholm does not associate this craving for interaction that wholly absorbs the individual with functional differentiation, but with what he calls "fluid societies", which include both complex contemporary societies and hunter-gatherer communities. The common denominator in these "fluid societies" lies in the individualism of the fight for survival. That is, the members of these societies feel existentially vulnerable, as they lack the "primary groups or ties" that provide solidarity and identity. For the author, it is this ontological angst that propels the quest for an intense and ardent love that is strong enough to confer some meaning, even if only provisional and temporary, upon their existences.

It is not the case here, of course, to endorse rashly about Lindholm's thesis. His findings, however, do serve as a warning against a kind of evolutionist sociology that leaps from a social history of love in Europe to claims of universal theoretical validity39. This is why this essay at once recovers Luhmann's description of amorous interaction and discards its macro-sociological consequences. Moreover, a Eurocentric reconstruction of the modern history of love, like Luhmann's, overlooks certain crucial developments. In effect, in few other fields would modern history seem to have cast and interwoven the different regions of the world so definitively as in the construction of romantic love. Just as the upper echelons of societies beyond Europe so avidly consumed and

emulated the romantic literature produced in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, Europe just as hungrily appropriated images, legends and fantasies of love from other parts of the world, which arrived in Europe in the guise of travel accounts and tales from the colonies 40. Nowadays, the global success of such products as "Bollywood" movies from India or Latin American soap operas shows that the ideals of romantic love are not spread centrifugally from Europe, but in a decentralized manner. Even if such productions rework the plots and formats of classical romanticism, they still create gender and lbody representations that have nothing whatsoever to do with "western" models.

Conclusion

In this conclusion I shall return to the five dimensions of romantic love previously mentioned – the fields of emotions, ideals and cultural practices and their expression as a relationship model and as a form of interaction.

Empirical studies show that an all-engulfing amorous relationship remains a common aspiration in modern societies. As such, in late modernity romantic love continues to play a central role as an ideal of love and as the trigger for its corresponding emotions. However, this desire for intensity finds itself coexisting with important changes in the romantic standard embraced by couples. Perhaps Honneth has a point when he identifies a lowering of expectations when it comes to amorous relationships. For Honneth, such relationships have changed from "pair bonding to a partnership of objectives" 41. This possibly amounts to a medium-term consolidation of what Burkart termed the "post-romantic" relationship 42.

One way or another, two cultural models would seem to persist in parallel: the ideal of life in pairs above everything and everyone else, generally predominant at the beginning of a relationship or during the more passionate moments of a lasting relationship, and a certain pragmatic love. While the former model is guided by the ideals of romantic love, pragmatism is based on values such as equality, dialogic understanding and the personal fulfillment of the partners.

As a cultural practice, romantic love is embedded in a wide range of products, objects, places and rituals. Thus, in contemporary societies, the economy is present in several spheres of love, offering cultural products that embody its ideals and feelings and providing the contexts in which to experience the romantic rituals. Not even in its pragmatic moments can a relationship shake off the market, as it interjects with its manuals, therapists and marriage crisis counselors ready to teach the foundations of a fair relationship. In only one of its dimensions does romantic love manage to resist the market: that of interaction ruled by a special code. In order to establish a romantic relationship it is necessary to create a (unlikely) communicative realm that separates the lovers away from their social environment. This special code of communication is what distinguishes consumers from lovers that use these rituals and products under the sign of love. In this symbolic-expressive way, the obliteration of the borders between the market and amorous interaction would signal the end of romantic love.

For Sabine

[1] Beck, Ulrich & Beck-Gernsheim, Elizabeth. Das ganz normale Chaos der Liebe. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1990; Featherstone, Mike. "Love and eroticism: an introduction". Theory, Culture & Society, vol. 15, no 3-4, 1998; Leis, Héctor & Costa, Sérgio. "Dormindo com uma desconhecida". In: Avritzer, Leonardo and Domingues, José Maurício (ed..). Teoria Social e Modernidade no Brasil. Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG, 2000.

[2] Illouz, Eva. Consuming the romantic utopia. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Der Konsum der Romantik. Frankfurt/M: Campus, 2003.

[3] Luhmann, Niklas. Liebe als Passion. Zur Codierung von Intimität. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1994 [1982].

[4] It may seem strange that the contribution of systems theory, by many labeled as a rigid and "cold" way of describing social issues, given its high level of abstraction and formalization, should be chosen here as a means of recovering the singularity of amorous relationships. Systems theory's sensibility to love comes from one's effort to detach the intimate system from all other systems, which requires attention to the idiosyncrasies of the code of love. Moreover, the style of authors like Luhmann imposes such precision on the description of the love code that the semantic used, expressive in its hermetic nature, awakens in the reader a feeling much like that caused by romantic lyricism, namely the complicit emotion of being caught red-handed in one's most hidden feelings.

[5] Cf. Flam, Helena. Soziologie der Emotionen. Konstanz: UVK, 2002.

[6] Weber, Max. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie , vol. 1. Tübingen: Mohr, 1972 [1917].

[7] Simmel, Georg. Schriften zur Philosophie und Soziologie der Geschlechter. Berlin: Wagenbach, 1983 [1911]. Ver Nord, Ilona. Individualität, Geschlechterverhältnisse und Liebe. Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2001.

[9] As an example of the extension of Simmel's interest to include the cultural practices of love, it is worth recalling his astute essay on coquetry. In this study, Simmel departs from Plato's assumption that love consists of a game of "to have or not to have" and points out that, "characteristic of coquetry, in its most banal aspect, is the sideways glance, with the head slightly cocked to one side. This look contains a withdrawal, though one associated with a fleeting urge to surrender oneself […]that is nonetheless symbolically denied, at the same time, by the opposing direction of the body and the head. Psychologically, this glance can last no longer than a few seconds, as the surrender harbors within itself its own pre-programmed and inevitable denial. This look contains the allure of the mysterious, the furtive, of that which cannot last. The yes and no are therefore inseparably intermixed within it. A full-on, face-to-face gaze, no matter how penetrative or avid, can never quite possess this trace of coquetry. At the highest level, the coquettish effect of tilting and turning resides in the hips: the 'wiggling' walk. Not only because such a walk […] visually accentuates the more sexually stimulating parts of the body while maintaining distance and reserve, but also because it sensualizes the surrender and withdrawal in a playful rhythm of uninterrupted alternation". (ibidem, P. 82). This and all versions of quotations from German and Spanish are free translations made by the author and the translator of this essay.

[9] Dux, Günther. "Liebe". In: Wulf, Christoph (ed.). Vom Menschen. Handbuch Historische Anthropologie. Weinhein/Basiléia: Beltz, 1997, p. 847.

[10] It is worth registering the important historical change that has occurred in the "reputation" of amorous emotions. The prevailing view in contemporary societies is that love is associated with a creative, unique and intense impulse, especially in the most fervent phases of its manifestation. It was the journalist and sociologist Francesco Alberoni who best expressed this vision, when, in dialogue with Freud, he discarded the association between romantic love and regression, stating that there is no evidence that a man falls in love with a woman just because she reminds him of his mother during his early childhood (Alberoni, Francesco. *O mistério do enamoramento*. Lisbon: Bertrand, 2003, P. 14). This view contrasts with the medical interpretation of the early 20th Century, as can be seen from a doctoral thesis submitted in Porto Alegre in 1908: "Passion is an obsession and represents, therefore, according to the greatest psychologists, the stigma of hereditary nervous degeneration. [...] Such crises often begin with pre-cordial oppression, subtle dyspnea, palpitations

or accelerated heart rate [...]. Momentary overexcitement or repeated nervous discharges cause […] a slight and general quivering, irregular breathing patterns, sometimes thoracic fits of gasping, sometimes shallow breathing […] People in love [...] do not ignore the inconveniences and absurdities of their passion, but sacrifice everything for it; their duties, their obligations, their wealth, even their lives. (Port, Leopoldo P. *Da intoxicação pelo amor*. 4th ed. Pellets: Echenique, 1923 [1908], P. 23).

[11] Cf. Gerhards, Jürgen. Soziologie der Emotionen. Fragestellungen, Systematik, Perspektiven. Munich: Juventa, 1988.

[12] Cf. Lenz, Karl. "Romantische Liebe. Ende eines Beziehungsideals?". In: Hahn, Kornelia & Burkart, Günter (ed.). Liebe am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1998.

[13] See Elias, Norbert. Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie , Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2002 [1969]; Burkart, Günter. "Auf dem Weg zu einer Soziologie der Liebe". In: Hahn & Burkart (ed.), op. cit.; Costa, Jurandir F. "Utopia sexual, utopia amorosa". In: Cardoso, Irene & Silveira, Paulo (ed..). Utopia e mal estar na cultura: perspectivas psicanalíticas. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1997.

[14] For a reconsctruction using Max Scheler, see Vandenberghe, Frédéric. Knowing what we love: notes towards a historical epistemology of love. Paper presented in: XXIX Encontro Anual da Anpocs, Caxambu, 2005.

[15] Gerhards, Jürgen e Schmidt, Bernd. Intime Kommunikation. Eine empirische Studie über Wege der Annäherung und Hindernisse für "safer sex". Baden Baden: Nomos, 1992, p. 20.

[16] Cf. Lenz, op. cit. As an ideal that embodies culturally diverse forms of materialization, romantic love naturally allows for variations, such as the dissociation from the process of procreation we see, for example, among homosexual couples or those that deliberately forego having children. As for the institutions, however, the idea still prevails that affection, sexuality and procreation ought to walk hand in glove, which creates difficulties for those who wish to escape the child-oriented model of heterosexual love. For a discussion on the situation in the United States, see Josephson, Jyl. "Citizenship, same-sex marriage, and feminist critics on marriage". Perspectives on Politics, vol. 3, No. 1, 2005.

[17] For the Brazilian case see Heilborn, Maria Luiza. Dois é par. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2004.

[18] Luhmann, op. cit.

[19] Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima moralia*. *Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* . Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1951, p. 29.

[20] Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and civilization: a philosophical inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

[21] Fromm, Erich. *Die Kunst der Liebe*. 60th ed. Stuttgart: Ullstein, 2003 [1956], p. 150.

[22] Habermas, Jürgen. *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne. Zwölf Vorlesungen*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1985.

[23] Illouz, Eva. *Consuming the romantic utopia*, op. cit.; "The lost innocence of love: romance as a postmodern condition". Theory, Culture & Society, vol. 15, no 3-4, 1998; "Vermarktung der Liebe. Bedeutungswandel der Liebe im Kapitalismus". WestEnd, vol. 2, no 1, 2005.

[24] Pseudonym of the Italian writer Amaliana Cambiasi Negretti (1897-1995), author of numerous sentimental novels[N.E.].

[25] Eco, Umberto. Nachschrift zum Name der Rose. Munique: Carl Hanser, 1984, p. 78.

[26] Holidays taken as a couple do not always represent a balm for amorous utopias. The excessive expectations and amount of time spent together during the days of "rest" can have reverse effects: in Germany and Italy, for example, one third of divorces occur immediately after holidays. This would explain the high demand for self-help books on the theme of "holidays and marital crises", which provide basic rules of behavior to prevent the extra time dedicated to the relationship from revealing the fragility of the bonds of affection that keep the couple together. (cf. http://www.psychotherapie.de/report/2000/08/00080801.htm. Accessed on October 30, 2005).

[27] Illouz, *Consuming the romantic utopia*, op. cit., p. 150, my bold print.

[28] A valuable contribution on the way romantic idealization and pragmatism combine in lovers' speech is supplied by Linda-Anne Rebhun in her study on conceptions of love in Caruaru (*The heart is unknown country: love in the changing economy of Northeast Brazil*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Whilst the women interviewed, all of whom came from poor backgrounds, condemned their cheating partners, who refused to obey the rules of romance, and referred to soap-opera style "lóvi" (the word 'love' as typically mispronounced by speakers of Brazilian Portuguese) as a moment of romantic rapture, they also joyfully repeated the old saying that "having a poor father is destiny, but a poor husband is plain stupidity". Using a distinct analytical key and researching the German context, Jutta Almendiger and collaborators ("Eigenes Geld - gemeinsames Leben. Zur Bedeutung von Geld in modernen Paarbeziehungen". In: Beck, Ulrich and Lau, Christoph (ed..). Entgrenzung und Entscheidung. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2004) reveal the articulation between diverse rationalities in the sphere of intimate life. For the authors, the basic imperative of not violating the romantic fantasies or the smooth running of the family routine, including the domestic budget, requires daily negotiations that involve the search for efficiency in the couple's financial management and in the preservation of its "sentimental economy".

[29] Illouz, "Vermarktung der Liebe", op. cit.

[30] Luhmann, op. cit., p. 13.

[31] Ibidem, p. 25.

[32] Ibidem, p. 19.

[33] Paz, Octavio. *La llama doble*. 7a ed. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2004 [1993].

[34] Ibidem, p. 29-30

[35] The author states, in general terms, that interviewees from the lower social classes tended to favor rituals and goods (souvenirs, cards, etc) created explicitly to transmit romantic affection, while those from the middle and upper classes were more likely to reject explicit consumerism in preference for goods and rituals associated with "anti-institutional values such as spontaneity, informality, and authenticity" (Illouz, *Consuming the romantic utopia*, op. cit., P. 252).

[36] Cf. Costa, Sérgio. *Dois Atlânticos*. Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG (forthcoming).

[37] Cf., for example, Hatfield, Elaine & Rapson, Richard. *Love and sex: cross-cultural perspectives*. Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon, 1996; Munck, Victor C. de (ed..). *Romantic love and sexual behavior: perspectives from the social sciences*. Westport: Praeger, 1998.

[38] Lindholm, Charles. "Love and structure". *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 15, no 3-4, 1998.

[39] The evolutionist lapse is clearly expressed in the work of Peter Fuchs, a follower of Luhmann. During one of his lectures about love, a student expressed her fear that she would be unable to ever love again now that her last romantic illusions had been obliterated by her study of systemic sociology. The consolation Fuchs offered his student reveals his theoretical Eurocentricity: "You will gain in complexity what you have lost in innocence. Whoever plays the game of love with excessive simplicity risks never getting to know it" (Fuchs, Peter. *Liebe, Sex und solche Sachen. Zur Konstruktion zu moderner Intimsysteme*. Konstanz: UVK, 1999, P. 57).

[40] Cf. Burkard, op. cit., p. 26.

[41] Honneth, Axel. Introduction to the dossier "Liebe und Kapitalismus". WestEnd, vol. 2, no 1, 2005, p. 79.

[42] Burkard, Günter. *Liebesphasen – Lebensphasen. Vom Paar zur Ehe zum Single und zurück?* Opladen: Leske

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Translation from Novos Estudos CEBRAP n.73, Nov 2005 p. 111-124