

From the Editor

What Is To Be Done With Sex?

This issue continues the discussion between Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupancic, Mladen Dolar, Keti Chukhrov, Aaron Schuster, and Oxana Timofeeva, which took place in Ljubljana in May 2014. The idea for this discussion was inspired by the short essay “The Anti-Sexus,” written by Andrey Platonov in 1926. This satirical essay is presented as an advertising brochure for a mass-produced masturbatory device, proposed by a large Western company for the Soviet market. This machine is a great invention, says the brochure, because it can enormously improve the productivity of human labor all over the planet by liberating people from sexual love and thus providing a perfect means of control over the population.

Platonov’s “The Anti-Sexus” is a remarkable document from the Russian Revolutionary avant-garde era, a highly unique period of cultural breakthrough that questioned all our habitual ideas concerning human society, proclaiming new models for politics, ethics, aesthetics, etc. For this era sexuality was a major concern. Between the pre-revolutionary period and Stalin’s restoration of traditional family values, the 1917 Russian October Revolution opened up a historical gap, where at least two contradictory tendencies dramatically coincided. One tendency was sexual liberation and emancipation at all levels of society. The other was the radical asceticism of the revolutionary, the idea of giving up sexual life as a bourgeois vestige for the sake of building a better world. Each of these tendencies related to the idea of creating a new man, a man of a communist future, whose economy of desire would be organized in a completely different way.

In contemporary capitalism, the economy of sex has again become a problem, but the stakes are different. They vary from a wide movement of sexual liberation on the level of private and individual freedoms in Western countries, to puritanism or growing restrictions and prohibitions in countries like Russia; from the widespread commodification of pleasure (the “society of enjoyment”) to asexuality as an identity or individual choice. New moral dilemmas appear when one prefers to masturbate

rather than encounter another human being in a potentially destructive (non-)relation.

Can or should sexuality be liberated? Can sexuality liberate? Can or should one liberate oneself from sexuality? Why should sexuality be conceived as a uniquely troublesome point of human existence? From our historical experience, relating to the sexual heritage of revolutionary struggles of the past century, and in light of contemporary forms of solitude and libidinal malaise, we raise and discuss these questions. In the course of this discussion, a certain sexual dialectics reveals itself as a series of contradictions. What if those things considered as emancipation and liberation were in fact an ultimate “anti-sexus” strategy of our times (Schuster)? How does this strategy, operated within a capitalist economy, deeply transform human beings (*Žižek*)? How does psychoanalysis reply to the popular idea of the sexual act as a universal cure (Dolar)? What are the limits of psychoanalysis and is there a way out of the libidinal economy to which it refers (Chukhrov)? Finally, what is the difference between sex and masturbation, and why does the slogan “Make love, not war” never work? In addition, we publish a discussion that took place in St. Petersburg in April 2015 between contemporary Russian poets and philosophers, dedicated to the future of sex and love, to their inevitable deadlocks, but also their utopian horizons.

The articles by Slavoj *Žižek*, Mladen Dolar, Keti Chukhrov, Aaron Schuster, and Oxana Timofeeva were first published in the Slovenian language in the special issue of *Problemi* (9–10, 2014), whereas the first English translation of “the Anti-Sexus” was published in *Cabinet* (51, 2013). We are thankful to *Problemi* for this selection and to *Cabinet* for granting their permission to reprint Platonov’s essay. Special thanks go to Mladen Dolar and Aaron Schuster for their collaboration and active engagement with this project.

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