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WE HAVE NEVER HAD SEX

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Abstract

The paper proposes an original approach to the analysis of the sexual economy of war and, together with Donna Haraway's claim "We have never been human," reconsiders Lacan's formula "There is no sexual relation" proceeding from the idea of sex as a humanizing practice. This idea is opposed to popular metaphors of animality and the naturalness of human sexual life. Thus, according to Georges Bataille sex, or rather eroticism, is what transforms not human beings into animals, but animals into human beings: just like labor in Engels, it presents a central principle of anthropogenesis. For Bataille, this transformation is an event that marked the passage between pre-history and history and the appearance of historical humanity. The paper places this argument into a paradoxical twist by suggesting a hypothesis that such a transformative event has not yet happened, and that, instead of sex, in today's capitalist society people rather practice, to quote Žižek, "masturbation with a living partner," where the integrity of a person is replaced by partial objects. This argument finds support in Platonov's satire on masturbation and his critique of the Anti-Sexus, the latter being both masturbatory and antisexual (i.e., something that prevents sexual relationships). The paper shows that there is a remarkable gap in Platonov's writings between two understandings of sex—as

“the soul of the bourgeoisie” which is to be overcome by the consciousness of the proletariat, and as what is to be postponed until a communist society will be built. It analyses the constitutive character of this gap, or ambiguity, for Platonov’s radical revolutionary asceticism.

Keywords

Andrey Platonov, Georges Bataille, masturbation, sex, war

I

“Make love, not war,” said the slogan associated both with the sexual liberation of the United States and Europe in the 1960s and the pacifist movement opposed to the Vietnam War. “Those guys look like they can’t make either of both,” Ronald Reagan joked about the protesters who made this claim in California in 1967 (D’Souza 1999: 71). “Those guys” wanted to make love instead of war, peacefully and deliberately, to use free love, which meant “polymorphous sexuality” (Marcuse 1966: xv), communal forms of experimental promiscuity, and various bodily pleasures as a revolutionary tool against bourgeois society built of repressive nuclear families and outdated morals. They thought honesty and equality were possible in love, and that comradeship and solidarity started in bed.

However, after all that the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Europe was not really followed by a political one (this strangely echoes the fact that vice versa, in the end the Russian revolution of 1917 did not bring sexual liberation¹). Free love made it all the way around, clockwise, left to right: its underlying idea of changing the world was replaced, step-by-step, by an imperative of changing one’s own attitude towards this world; sexual experimentation became an ordinary part of refined bourgeois culture. Its liberating energy was dissipated by mutual agreements, contracts, and calculations, seeking to equate the amount of orgasms and bodily pleasure consumed by independent partners who respected each other’s rights and personal space and avoided any reactionary feelings (including love as addiction, jealousy as possessiveness, etc.) which could threaten their individual autonomy and internal peace.²

Since then it appears that so much love has been made, so many bodies shaking in peaceful orgasms, but so many wars have been waged, too,

¹ On sexual reaction in the Soviet Union as a failure of revolution, see Reich (1986: 157–281).

² See the author’s correspondence with Nikolay Oleynikov (2013: 69–100).

and are still waging, so that it became clear that making love, however free, does not really present an alternative to waging war. On the contrary, it seems there is something deeply in common between war and lovemaking: not only—as mass culture and popular psychology indicate—that there are some elements of fight in any love game, but also both love and war are considered to belong to the very definition of the human species: people often claim that non-human animals copulate but never really make love, just as they fight but never really wage wars.

Such a way of talking about non-human animals is, indeed, absolutely hackneyed. Before the classical anthropocentric paradigm started to get seriously criticized, it was repeatedly said that animals, for example, look but don't really see, or they have a voice but not really a language, or some natural needs but not really desires, some impulses but not really drives, and so on. In brief, they do or have something, but this something is not yet endowed with the same sense as it is for us, humans, that they do or have some *mere* something (like need, sex, and fight), whereas we do or have some *special*, or even *proper* one (like desire, love, and war).

This metaphysical strategy of drawing a line of difference between human and non-human animals is now widely opposed either by evidence that non-human animals in fact do love, speak, think, desire, and so on (which is another way of positing that they, too, are human) (see Rowlands 2002), or by disclosing the evil, repressive, violent nature of reason, language, love, and other “officially” human things—not to mention war. And yet, I will refer to this old compromised strategy and the discussion on the human/non-human divide as it regards love and war once again in order to retrieve from it another possibility, which was heretofore totally disregarded, namely the one of true love—or true sex—which we have never had before.

Although this might look very rough and draw serious objections, I rely here on language in making an equation, just for convenience, between love and sex. I simply use “making love” as another way of talking about having sex, and as objectionable as it might be, I find extremely significant the fact that while at some higher level of abstraction love and sex might seem two completely different things, if not opposites, this rough equation nevertheless exists and persists in our everyday language. Doesn't it actually bring us to some unconscious truth, or even unconscious desire, which the everyday language reveals: making love and having sex should be one and the same?

This has nothing to do with the commonplaces and double standards of morality, which suggest a popular delusion of having the free choice between mere sex (“animal,” as they say), and proper sex “for love.” I consciously “mistake” sex for love so as not to mistake something different for sex or love—namely, masturbation or porn. I argue that in a capitalist society that leads constant wars for expanding markets, the difference between sex and porn, between sex and masturbation, is more relevant and

crucial than the one between sex and love. The main question of this essay could therefore be the following: Where does the sexual being of the human animal stay with regard to capitalism, and why there is war?

In order to approach this question one has to first leave behind the widespread naïve belief that sex brings us back to our animal roots, making us wild like beasts, and so on. Yes, there is a certain bestial element to sex, but it is of a high complexity and quite far from the alleged immediate natural animality which still dwells somewhere in a mythical paradise. Such a naïve belief in naturalness (and therefore a kind of beauty and innocence) of all bodily functions including sexual ones was of those false flags which brought the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s to a dead end, but which is still repeatedly raised by various new age utopias and spiritual movements searching for an authentic origin of humankind and universe. There is no natural sexuality that one would freely enjoy in multiple ways in peace and happiness. The human animal is one who makes wars and tries to find ways of making love in wartime. Other options do not exist: if there is peace, it is not in the mess of our beds, but only, and scarcely, in the solitude of our graves; in the cemetery where we, supposedly, rest.

“Far from providing the natural foundation of human lives, sexuality is the very terrain upon which humans detach themselves from nature: the idea of sexual perversion or of a deadly sexual passion is totally foreign to the animal universe,” says Slavoj Žižek in *Less Than Nothing* (2012b: 440). In the passage he criticizes Hegel, who “describes how, through culture, the natural substance of sexuality is cultivated, sublated,” but misses such a great moment as an “excess of negativity,” through which human sexuality is “not only transformed or civilized, but, much more radically, *changed in its very substance*,” so that, instead of natural sexuality, we are dealing with this totally “metaphysical,” unnatural passion which we are trying to domesticate. This excess of negativity, unnoticed by Hegel, opens “the very dimension of ‘unruliness’ identified by Kant as the violent freedom on account of which man, in contrast to animals, needs a master” (Žižek 2012b: 440–41). In place of Hegel’s cultural negation of nature, Žižek thus considers human sexuality as an unruly excess of unnatural negativity which itself needs to be domesticated.

A very important account on this excessive negativity is to be found not so much in Lacan, whose work is undoubtedly an immediate reference for Žižek, but in Georges Bataille. Even if his philosophy of transgression would be qualified by Lacan as a case of psychosis comparable to that of Schreber (1971: 101), or he is suspected by Žižek of “irresponsible nihilism” (Ryder 2010: 94–108), it is precisely the excess of negativity that, for Bataille, opposes specifically human sexuality—which he insists on naming *eroticism*—to “mere” animal sexual behavior. “Essentially, eroticism is the sexual activity of man, as opposed to that of animals,” he says in *The History of Eroticism* (Bataille 1991: 27). Bataillean animals simply stay

in the immediacy and immanence of nature, in its, so to say, positive continuity (see Bataille 1992: 17), where they endlessly enjoy unlimited sexual freedom. In Bataille's dualist (anti)philosophy animals clearly stay as utopian figures of natural immanence, which some proponents of sexual liberation and numerous peaceful new agers do also believe in. But the significant difference is that for Bataille, humans do not have any direct access to the continuity of nature—and this is already an argument, which makes sense regardless of whether such continuity exists or not. The sexual life of humans is not natural but is erotic, that is, highly mediated by prohibitions, prescriptions, and rituals. The border of prohibition, beyond which there is nature, is precisely the line of negation: “Man is the animal that negates nature” (Bataille 1991: 61).

Such negation of nature in Bataille is not an overcoming or dialectical *Aufhebung*, as it was in Hegel, but rather a violent exclusion: “The forms of animality were excluded from a bright world which signified humanity” (1991: 61–62). A total transformation of nature is a spectacle: nature is neither eliminated, nor really transformed, but excluded; such things as death, spontaneous sexual intercourse, menstrual blood, consanguineous mating, or defecation do not become more sublime and cultivated, but stay beyond the border of prohibition—that is how the domain of sacred violence appears (and thus, after all, animals become gods). One might compare it to repression in a psychoanalytic sense; the appearance of the sacred out of excluded nature at the level of social organization is parallel to the appearance of the unconscious out of excluded animal sexuality and instincts on the level of individual psychological life. The latter moment refers to what Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* described as organic repression that happened with man's adoption of an upright posture (2002).

From this negation of natural animality that is the first step of Bataillean humanity, there is no way back. There is nothing less animal or natural than our highly mediated rituals, deeply rooted in religious tradition, of orgy, love, prostitution (starting from the sacred, or temple prostitution), or marriage. The same logic can be applied to sexual liberation: the communal promiscuity and experimentation with pleasure of civilized western people within contemporary capitalist society have nothing to do with the return to the animal origin which they seek, but rather indicate yet another refined level of detachment from it. Sex does not make us animals. According to Bataille, it once made us human, and since then our life is wounded by this violent rupture with animality, whose irreducible material trace is forever our own body tortured by erotic desire which tends towards obscenity and perversion. It is precisely this element of excessive, unnatural negativity that conditions our desire and makes its objects so attractive for us.

Obscenity deserves special attention in this regard. It is, as Bataille characterizes it, “not exactly an object, but rather a relation between an

object and the mind of a person” (1991: 54). Thus, nudity for humans is not the same as it is for animals. Animals walk around naked, but this causes no inconvenience to the animals themselves, nor to the humans who observe them. A naked beast does not really look obscene; we hardly remember that it is naked, as if it were protected from our bawdy undressing gaze by nature itself. In turn, in the world of human beings, nudity, as Bataille says, “slips towards obscenity” (1991: 151), but it does so precisely because it reveals forbidden human animality that hides itself in dresses. Moreover, as he says, “obscenity itself is nothing but natural animality, the horror of which establishes our humanity” (1991: 149).

This extensive reference to Bataille is used here as a way to once again reconsider a perspective of interpreting sex as that which transforms animals into humans (and not the other way around). It is precisely this negative, mediated, ritualistic sexuality that brings us to the so-called human universe. Sexual intercourse, so to say, initiates us as human beings. In Bataille this transformation is a historical drama about the beginning of humankind. Such a perspective finds a brilliant cinematic illustration in Nagisa Oshima’s *Max, Mon Amour* (1986). The main female character of this movie is in love with a monkey, whose name is Max. Her husband gets jealous, but is also curious. He wants to see how it happens between the woman and the monkey. While she is away, he brings to Max a prostitute. The animal, however, does not show any interest in the prostitute. So the woman tries to seduce him by offering him an apple—but he rejects the fruit, too.

All the symbolic difference between human and animal, on which western Christian culture is based, is here in this apple: if the animal takes it, it will have sex with the prostitute, acquire knowledge of good and evil and finally be expelled, naked and obscene, from his innocent animal Paradise. Its offspring will work hard, give birth in pain, lead wars, start revolutions, and constantly prohibit themselves from making love: the intensity of their orgasms will depend upon violation of this very prohibition. Eroticism contributes to anthropogenesis—this is one of Bataille’s main points.³ An erect and obscene human body wants to explode for the whole Christian universe, twisted around the initial sin.

II

I will now refer to another remarkable perspective, in comparison to which Bataille’s radical negative anthropology still remains a part of the so-called bourgeois culture. Quite a unique, exceptional view on human sexuality is produced out of the historical and bodily experience of knowing something different than capitalism, however catastrophic or ephem-

³ For more on Bataille’s notion of eroticism see my book: Timofeeva (2015).

eral this difference might be. It refers to the avant-garde urge of changing the entire universe together with the very nature of humanity and animality, changing the very nature of nature (which blew up the brains of some Russians right after October Revolution of 1917). The idea was not to liberate human sexuality or to liberate humans via sexuality—as was suggested by Wilhelm Reich and other Freudo-Marxists who sought the cause of the political revolution's decay in the Soviet Union in the failure of sexual emancipation (Reich 1986: 157–281)—but to liberate them *from* sexuality.

“What is to be done with sex?” This was one of the most urgent questions of nascent Soviet culture. Different solutions to this question were outlined, proposed, and deliberately applied by people, or violently imposed by the state, on everyday practices in the post-revolutionary years prior to the so-called Stalinist reconstruction that brought back traditional family values and sexual restrictions. A lot of research is dedicated to tendencies, movements, and solutions which took place during this short period (e.g., Naiman 1997). I cannot give the whole panorama of the paradoxes of the failure of sexual revolution in Russia (note, however, that it collapsed for different reasons than the western sexual revolution of the 1960–1970s, which was happening within the framework of the capitalist economic structure where it was absorbed by processes of production and consumption of bodily pleasure), but will focus exclusively on the case of Andrey Platonov's position on sexuality, and only in one of its particular moments.

In his short critical essay *Dostoevsky*, Platonov writes:

The bourgeoisie produced the proletariat. Sex gave birth to consciousness. Sex is the soul of bourgeoisie. Consciousness is the soul of the proletariat. Bourgeoisie and sex did the work of their life—they have to be destroyed (Platonov 2004: 45–46).

Each short sentence in this quotation deserves an extended commentary. If the idea that the bourgeoisie produced the proletariat sounds familiar to anyone who has heard of the *Communist Manifesto* at least once, then sex giving birth to consciousness makes a sudden shift in the Marxist vision of how things developed. Here, as in some other aspects, Platonov seems to be quite close to Bataille⁴ with his statements about eroticism being what makes an animal human—he recognizes the exceptional transformative potential of sex. However, consciousness in Platonov does not necessarily equal the human. Consciousness is the soul of the proletariat, he says. The bourgeoisie, too, has a soul, which is sex. Both

⁴ The first comparison between Platonov and Bataille was proposed by Thomas Seifrid, who discusses their gnostico-materialist tendencies (1998).

sex and consciousness are *souls*. The demarcation line, the place where the passage happens, the point of no return, is not between humans and other animals, but between two souls: that of the proletariat and of the bourgeoisie. There is a moment of transformation or even *metamorphoses*, of one soul into another, of sex into consciousness. The bourgeoisie is then, so to say, the body of sex; it is as productive and historically necessary, as is sex, but its work is done, and hence its time is over: another body is already born where consciousness dwells. No sex for a communist.

Let me make a short digression here to share some considerations on how in this context we should understand the word “soul.” Andrey Platonov is in fact a kind of spontaneous Aristotelian. Namely, he reads the soul as animal life. As emphasized by Eugene Thacker, it is not so much *zoe* or *bios* (as Agamben suggest), as *psyche*, which defines first and foremost the meaning of Aristotelian *anima*: *psyche*, that is the principle-of-life; that is, basically, what animates the animal (2010: 13). Platonov’s soul is not a spiritual substance, as in Christian tradition, but a corporeal one. Animals not only move, but transform into one another and this transformation in Aristotle take the shape of metempsychosis (in which ancient Greeks believed).⁵ It is interesting how, in his *History of Animals*, Aristotle describes this processes in the case of the butterfly—from caterpillars through to chrysalis to the winged creature that we call the *psyche* or butterfly (Aristotle 1970: 175). The Aristotelian soul is a butterfly.

In Platonov the soul is animal, too. It is synonymous with life. In his novel *Soul*, he describes a nomadic and very poor nation wandering about the desert in Central Asia. The nation is called Dzhan, which means “*soul*,” or “*dear life*” (Platonov 2008: 25). He is talking about “feeding the soul” with animal meat, which provides the body with its own “good soul”: the human soul eating the animal body while the human body is eating the animal soul (Platonov 2008: 92). Not only does the soul move from one body to another, but the life itself transforms—metempsychosis goes together with metamorphoses. Soul is in Platonov the very substance of life (and is basically, in the situation of power and absolute lack of any material resources, the very substance out of which people are supposed to build communism).

In the chapter of my book on animals, dedicated to Platonov, I compare his “poor life” with Agamben’s “bare life” (Timofeeva 2011; 2012: 139–57), but the same thing can be also called “naked soul.” And yes, there is such a character in Platonov—it is celebrated in his very short (two page) 1921 satirical essay called “The Human Soul is an Obscene Animal.” At the beginning of this essay Platonov writes about a communist, “who has a beast in his heart, and whose soul is free from underwear

⁵ See Bozovic (2000: 17); see also some preliminary notes on Platonov’s soul (Timofeeva 2012: 136).

and boots of decency” (2004: 168–70). The beast of the soul is naked and exposed in its desire for communism. Moreover, it is obscene. It’s not the human body that is obscene in its animality, as in Bataille, but the human soul, “a miraculous beast.”

On the other hand, in Platonov’s *Chevengur* (1978: 80) the human soul is depicted as a “eunuch,” a passionless observer, a “little spectator,” a “midnight watcher,” or “overseer” who lives within the person, although one who “never occupies his own body” (Podoroga 1991: 385). The eunuch of the soul is a figure of castration (Magun 2010: 88), or, as Valery Podoroga puts it, of abstention and purity, based on a single fundamental prohibition, that is, the prohibition of masturbation, “understood broadly enough to include any forms and artifacts of sexual pleasures” (1991: 406). Between the obscenity of the beast and the coolness of the eunuch, the idea that sex is the soul of the bourgeoisie and consciousness the soul of the proletariat is even more puzzling.

As emphasized by some scholars, in his approach to sexuality Platonov moves from the radical revolutionary asceticism of the 1920s, which presents some spiritual drive of Christian Gnosticism queerly mixed with communist utopianism, or some sectarianism seeing victory over sex as victory over death (Hanzen-Löwe 2009: 178), to the rehabilitation of family and sexual life in his later period (Naiman 1998; Livers 2000). His early radical tendencies are, of course, also in focus of the feminist critique, which demonstrate that the writer associates woman with the bourgeoisie and ascribes her all the vulgarity of sex corrupting the revolutionary cause and drawing humanity back to the past. Platonov, especially in the early (pre-Stalinist, the most utopian) period of his literary work, is reproached for being a misogynist (Bullock 2005). There is a lot of confusion here, also because the word “sex” in Platonov is used in both senses of sexuality and gender, and in both cases sex means something (to be) overcome. I would like to suggest, however, that this necessity to overcome does not imply any contempt of sex, asexuality (indifference to sex, absence of sexual desire) or antisexuality. On the contrary, “dark passion” matters more than anything else.

As has already been said, in his vision sex makes one conscious. It is not humanization in a strict sense, because those who were living, say, before consciousness, were humans too (moreover, in a number of Platonov’s writings, animals and plants are also human—they all have a kind of silent human soul within their animal or vegetable bodies). It is just that not every human being is *conscious*—for instance, the bourgeoisie is not, therefore it *needs* sex in order to become conscious. Does this sound really antisexual?—No. Sex is not just a reactionary phenomenon, but is first and foremost a necessary emancipatory force. Without sex, such a transformation of one soul into another would have not been possible.

Furthermore, in a broader sense the conscious proletariat, born from the sex of the bourgeoisie, is not free of desire. It just desires not sex itself,

but rather something else—namely, it wants communism.⁶ One can read it as that very unnatural desire, negativity, which, according to Žižek transforms the very substance of sex. An intensity of this political desire is bigger than that of a sexual one. In fact, every living creature in Platonov wants communism, even a burdock,⁷ but, so to say, they do not know that they want it, or cannot say so. In the proletariat this desire is conscious, which is why proletarians are able to go so far as to deliberately use the energy withdrawn from sexual abstention for the building of a common communist future, for better or for worse (therein Platonov is extremely ambiguous: he knows what the burdock want, but no one knows what, if anything, Platonov himself wants, and what he *wants to say*). As with all other animals, Platonov's proletarians indeed feel sexual desire, but they constantly postpone its satisfaction until the moment when their political project is finally realized and a new society is built: this postponement is a permanent motive of his prose.⁸

I have already suggested elsewhere that Platonov's Bolsheviks and communists are *revolutionary animals* (Timofeeva 2012: 145–47). Animals meant those sensual beings whose desire does not know any (dialectical, intellectual, linguistic, etc.) interruption or rupture until its satisfaction or death (if they do not get what they want). Platonov's animals do not give up. Their desires are unbearable and desperate. That is how, for example, he describes them in *Soul*:

...he knew the direct, unbearable feelings of wild animals and birds. They cannot weep and so find comfort for themselves, and forgiveness for their enemy, in tears and in exhaustion of heart. They can only act, wanting to wear out their suffering in combat, inside the dead body of their enemy or in their own destruction (Platonov 2008: 89).

Animals are even voluptuous: just like the bourgeois, the smallest animals hurry to love each other—and this is how life persists and tries to maintain itself in anticipation of a better future, as if sex was needed for the bourgeois and other animals in order to keep the body alive, that is,

⁶ On the desire for communism in Platonov see: Flatley (2008: 158–90); Jameison (1994: 97).

⁷ “Chepurny touched a burdock – it too wanted communism [...] Just like the proletariat, this grass endures the life of heat and the death of deep snow” (Platonov 1978: 198); see also Flatley (2008: 186).

⁸ In his essay on the negativity revolution in Platonov, Artemy Magun argues that Platonov's abstention relates not so much to sexuality in general as to orgasm as its culminating point. To postpone means to resist an achievement, an end to a certain process, to resist eschatology and movement of time towards the end. Magun further explains Platonov's rejection of sex as caused by his fear of castration, symbolized by the figure of the woman (2010).

endowed with the soul. They might not know exactly what their real desire is, but we communists know. The conscious proletariat interprets unconscious animal desire politically, as the desire for communism. It will let its own sexuality free only after this primary political desire is satisfied and the happy future will arrive. "One has to wait for another five or ten years for a communism to arrive, when mechanisms will enter into labor and let people free for a mutual passion," says one of the characters of Platonov's *Sea of Youth* (1990: 316). Such an animal cannot just make love before communism is built—this is yet another, not so explicit, side of Platonov's asceticism, which is revealed through animality and complicates the initial idea of the already achieved victory of the consciousness of the proletariat over the sex of the bourgeoisie.

There must be something which binds these two Platonovs—the one of sex as *fait accompli* and the one of its postponement towards a proper communist future (this sex, which is yet to happen, is actually never seriously discussed in Platonov; not only is it itself postponed, but also the very idea of it is put off). What happens in this intermediate period, so to speak, between the two sexes? It's easy to suggest that masturbation would be a solution—and this is precisely what some scholars do, even interpreting Platonov's essay "The Anti-Sexus"—which seems to be the bitterest parody on masturbation—as a veiled apology of it. In "The Anti-Sexus," Platonov pitilessly ridicules the capitalist ideology of effectiveness and shows its dependence on taking control over, and calculating sexual enjoyment. It is the explicit content of an alleged advertising brochure promoting a masturbatory device for the Soviet market already successfully distributed in western capitalist countries.

In his important analysis of the avant-garde's take on sex, Mikhail Zolotonosov claims that Platonov's "The Anti-Sexus" is a parody not on capitalist society, but, on the contrary, on the Soviet one, which either imposes on people a moral of asceticism and sexual abstention, or appeals to the idea of rationalizing people's emotional life and the scientific organization of labor. However, according to Zolotonosov it is not only a parody: in fact, Platonov creates his fantasy of a total onanization of some overseas capitalist society in order to actually oppose it to the restrictions of communists obsessed with their phobia of sex and masturbation and the ideas of the discipline of communist bodies. For Zolotonosov it is not only a negative parody on the realities of Soviet life, there is also a "serious hedonist meaning" in "The Anti-Sexus," which thus suggests masturbation as a positive alternative to the ascetic principles aggressively imposed by communist propaganda, and anticipates a positive attitude toward it in contemporary medicine (1999: 472). But isn't this healthy, sterile masturbation, now widely advertised, precisely what Platonov is laughing at?

As opposed to this "reverse" interpretation (when, roughly speaking, instead of "capitalism" we should read "communism," and instead of

“masturbation is bad” we should read “masturbation is good” in a kind of Orwellian manner), I am defending a naïve, literary reading of Platonov, which makes him more than a writer who was producing parodies—now belonging to the history of literature—of the society he lived in. What he explicitly said, directly and clearly, proves that he was an untimely thinker, an intellectual whose ideas are extremely relevant now as ever.

As emphasized by Igor Chubarov, according to Platonov sexuality in bourgeois civilization is “essentially masturbatory” (2011: 244). “The Anti-Sexus,” this very short text from 1926, gives an in-depth analysis of and diagnoses contemporary capitalism rather than socialism of the 1920s. The very title of this essay—“The Anti-Sexus”—cannot vouch for masturbation as a hedonistic solution for the repressed sexuality of the Soviets simply because the device it advertises is *antisexual* (and—not to forget—Platonov himself is not: the communist asceticism⁹ he propagates is not antisexual). Masturbation is not ascetic. It is, as it were, hedonist, but: *masturbation is not sex, it is antisex*. The apparatus described by Platonov is designed to *prevent sex*. With the Anti-Sexus, capitalist production imposes masturbation (healthy, safe, pleasurable, harmless, individually designed, cheap, etc.) instead of sex (which inevitably causes problems since other people are involved). There is a kind of synchrony between this machine and a chastity belt or any other archaic antisexual device—they serve the same purpose. You touch yourself in order not to touch others and not to be touched by them. Paraphrasing Charlie Chaplin’s “I am against the Anti-Sexus,”¹⁰—I am against masturbation (let this make me Platonov’s character, too).

This runs against the current, indeed. Nowadays masturbation is praised not only in medicine. Thus, according to Wilson, in today’s capitalist society the function of sex has changed, not from the reproductive to the pleasurable, as we frequently hear, but rather from the dyadic to the onanistic: “for a large and increasing number of persons masturbation has become the dominant form of sexual activity, if it can be so understood” (1989: 136–37). After the publication of the Kinsey reports (1998[1948]; [1953]), and then Masters and Johnson’s research (1966), masturbation, previously stigmatized in Christian tradition, was now considered harmless and common, even a cure. The use of masturbation is universally proven—it is not only physically healthy and gives the body necessary relaxation, providing mental comfort and therefore better social security and sanity, but is also totally politically correct and liberat-

⁹ On the asceticism of Platonov’s socialist man see the remarkable essay by Georg Lukács (1937).

¹⁰ “I’m against the Anti-Sexus. It doesn’t allow for intimacy, for the living interaction of people’s souls” (Platonov 2013). “Chaplin’s would seem the lone voice of humanist reason in a text otherwise dedicated to the mechanization of intimate life. But even here there is an ambivalent twist,” as Aaron Schuster comments on this (2013: 46).

ing. When we masturbate, we do not need to interact with living people, which is good not only for us but also for these people—our fantasy does not harm anyone, physically or psychologically. No addiction, no misunderstandings, no shame, no disgrace, no broken hearts. It gives a strictly individual pleasure, and does not violate the rights and borders of the other, whose sexual desire and the content of whose sexual fantasies do not meet our own. Masturbation is not only mainstream,¹¹ but paradigmatic; it brutally replies, using the mute sign language to the Lacanian formula “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship” (Lacan 1998: 12).

In his essay on Platonov, Žižek describes a gadget called the “Stamina Training Unit,” available in today’s market and actually quite close to what was imagined by Platonov. “The product is available in different colors, tightness, and forms that imitate all three main openings for sexual penetration (mouth, vagina, anus). What one buys here is simply the partial object (erogenous zone) alone, deprived of the embarrassing additional burden of the entire person” (Žižek 2012a: 10). Accompanying this observation, which precisely gets to the root of the problem, Platonov’s deep intuition brings us to the conclusion that capitalism itself is anti-sexual, together with the countable, healthy masturbatory pleasures it provides. “Masturbation is the essence of the disciplinary society where time is money,” says Wilson (1989: 136). What if this society is ruled by what Aaron Schuster calls an “invisible ‘handjob’ of the market” (2013: 42)? Isn’t it then that all sexual toys overflowing the contemporary market are at the same time *antisexual toys*? Above them all, capitalism is a universal antisexual device which prevents real sex by making us “masturbate with a living partner” or without (Žižek 2008).¹²

The role that objects, as mentioned by Žižek, play in the capitalist economy of pleasure should not be underestimated. The art of partial sexual objects is called porn. It serves the purpose of masturbation.¹³ We mistake porn for sex, as well as mistaking masturbation for love. Capitalism is a society of loners who keep masturbating to porn while dreaming about love. We throw our sperm into the junkyard of partial objects, organs without bodies, and bodies without souls, while dreaming about sex. Capitalism makes us concentrate on the screen of visual representation, where these objects are exposed for our pleasure.

War is the perfect machine for producing partial objects for the purpose of the great capitalist handjob. The visual, material evidence of war

¹¹ See Attwood, ed. (2009), especially Chapter 5, “Mainstreaming of Masturbation: Autoeroticism and Consumer Capitalism” (Tuck 2009: 77–93).

¹² “The term ‘masturbation’ can refer not only to situations where a given person is alone, but where two (or more) individuals are engaged in one or another form of sexual activity” (Wilson 1989: 136).

¹³ For Marxist and feminist account on porn, masturbation and capitalism see: Wilson (1989: 130–99), and Soble (1986).

is dismembered bodies and disembodied members, spread legs and hands, breasts, open mouths without faces. War porn gives the molds to other forms of porn involved into capitalist production and the consumption of pleasures. This is the one function of war in capitalist libidinal economy. The other function too serves the general purpose of preventing sex: war separates potential partners; soldiers do not come back to their fiancées; they will lose their hands before they will be able to hug their beloved ones.¹⁴ That's why the slogan "make love, not war" misses the mark—there is no free choice between war and love making. We would love to, but just cannot make love until there is war—we can only masturbate.

Of course war as such is not correlated with capitalism: there were wars long before. Capitalist economy, however, in spite of the technological conditions for peace, keeps balanced with some new type of imperialist war involving multiple players roaming about the world—from Vietnam to Afghanistan, from Iraq to Palestine, from Ukraine to Syria. As was already emphasized by Rosa Luxemburg in 1913, wars, caused by expansion and violent struggle for new markets, actually provide a positive circulation of capital (Luxemburg 1951). But these wars of new type also contribute to the imaginary of a new type—they are highly represented in the media, brought into our lives as series of images which we consume with a stream of information. In this sense, war under capitalism is a production line which provides partial objects for our masturbation, or makes us partial objects for the masturbation of others. The war machine is thus yet another antisex, which makes us masturbate to porn not even with living, but with dead (or undead) partners and prevents us having sex or making love with each other. Why so? The following argument is suggested as a kind of animal cross-reading of Platonov and Bataille, in times of war, under capitalism.

On the one hand, there is a strong rational kernel in Bataille's idea that sex makes us human out of animals, but his claim that this is a historical event which occurred in the old days and made us forever irreversibly human remains suspended. What if we have never yet been human?¹⁵ What if the transformative event of sex had not yet occurred? On the other hand, not everything is simple with Platonov's idea of sex producing consciousness. Again, one must not hurry to agree with his claim that this is what already happened—as if we were already living in communism, where not sex, but conscious creative activity reigned. Radical revolutionary asceticism refuses antisex or masturbation in order to keep alive a communist fantasy.

¹⁴ See the dialog-performance with Nikolay Oleynikov "Making Love in Wartime: Sex, Beasts, Violence." (Timofeeva & Oleynikov 2014).

¹⁵ "We have never been human" paraphrases Donna Haraway: this is the title of the first chapter of her *When the Species Meet* (2008), who, in turn, paraphrases Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991).

What if Platonov's third position, a kind of intermediate point between past bourgeois (overcome) and future communist (postponed) sex, far from praising masturbation, which turns to be a sensual accomplice of the capitalist mechanism of making profits from waging wars, can rather be described as an anticipation, fantasizing about overcoming sex while still postponing it for a better future, where it will finally give birth to consciousness? What if we just add "what if" to the claim that sex already produced consciousness and is therefore to be abolished? It will then become not even a regulative idea, but an anticipation which gives content to our, still unconscious (as far as we are still bourgeois, still animal, etc.), political desire, which we can only experience as sexual because we do not know other options. We are still waiting for sex, we still want it, and thus we anticipate communism.

So, capitalism and war mobilize porn in order to make us masturbate with living, dead, or undead partners, and to prevent us from having sex (in Platonov's sense, as a mutual passion that we postpone) because sex, the desire of which anticipates communism, is a danger. Once we have it, it can, as Platonov suggests, give birth to consciousness, to some new humanity which has never existed before, just like a simple kiss in a fairy tale can make a swan, or a frog, a princess, and a gift of a prostitute can make a monkey a man. But first it will awaken the obscene beast of our soul, which, when naked, suddenly wants communism. "An unregulated sex is an unregulated soul," (Platonov 2013: 50) say the Anti-Sexus's advocates. The aim of their machine is to get rid of bestial obscenity, which comes into the world with a human animal soul. Capitalist governments send soldiers to war and make consumers masturbate in order to exclude any possibility of metamorphoses, to prevent the magic love we have never made before. One of the main components of our sexual desire, due to which it cannot be fully satisfied, is this essentially political fantasy of a non-capitalist love, which is there to awaken us from the oblivion of masturbation and war, towards a conscious human life. This is the only sex I want.

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