

Sexual Revolution and Contemporary Culture

Liberated Eros or New Symbolic Control

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Abstract—Sexual revolution leads to numerous cultural shifts and transformations that were believed to deliver the subject of eros from the authoritarian oppression of patriarchal traditionalism and bourgeois puritanism. The article questions whether an affected individual becomes freer or finds him or herself in a new order of symbolic control. While the previous version of control rested mostly on external coercion, this new one is primarily built on inner desires imprinted in the subject by the ruling symbolic system. A social subject is formed so that the failure in sexual realization (as an object of desire or as an owner of this object) means the defeat of social realization as well, and the access to “liberated” sexuality requires accepting the rules of the economy of desire.

Keywords—sexual revolution; sexuality; eros; phallus; control; contemporary culture; subjectness

I. INTRODUCTION

The so called “repressive hypothesis” primarily formulated by Z. Freud, W. Reich and H. Marcuse states that eros is being constantly curbed by cultural institutions including those of bourgeois capitalistic society [1]. Since 1960s we witness the complex of cultural, symbolic, political and legal processes aimed at the liberation of eros named “the sexual revolution”. However, it would not be superfluous to raise the question again and again, does such liberation bring real freedom to the subject of eros, love and sexuality? Does it essentially expand the boundaries of self-realization of the subject, and if so, what is happening at the level of external (communicational, representational) and internal (responsible for the formation of identity) structures to ensure the inclusion of the subject in the control mechanisms? In other words: does the liberation of sexuality, the numerous manifestations of which we observe in the modern world, make a person freer? And is it not suddenly that the subject of this liberation is even more dependent – now on both his/her own sexuality and the principles regulating his subjectivity?

II. THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION: ITS FOUNDATION, MAIN TENDENCIES AND CONTRADICTIONS.

It is commonly accepted that we owe the sexual revolution to the West, and specifically to America and the countries of Western Europe, where in the 1960s and 1970s

there begins a titanic shift in cultural landmarks, behavioral practices, and later, and legal regulations related to both the sexual life of the individual, and the understanding of marriage and family relations as a whole, as well as male and female identities. In general, this is true, but we should also mention a very interesting and heuristic fact, often overlooked, that the first attempt of the sexual revolution in the modern civilization, legally legitimized, was performed in the Soviet Union. Reich in particular draws our attention to the point that almost after the October Revolution of 1917 two decrees were signed by V. Lenin: “On the abolition of marriage” and “On civil marriage, on children and on entering into acts of civil status” that revised the principles of legal regulation of marriage and family relations existed in tsarist Russia [2]. The new legislation greatly simplified the process of “entry” into the marriage and the “exit” from it, equalized the rights of men and women, and in practice the strategy of “new life” sometimes demanded the recognition of community of sexual partners in the communes. However, as Reich shows, the state laws that might have created a legal platform for the emancipation of interpersonal relations and the liberation of the intimate life of the individual from authoritarian oppression, met confusion and misunderstanding of the majority of the population that either still shared traditional patriarchic beliefs, or was in embarrassment and uncertainty about what exactly should be done with this freedom that fell upon people. In the 1930s a political “rollback” to the authoritarian principles of regulating interpersonal relations took place, the interests of the family were ideologically put in line with the interests of the communist party and the state. Thus, while the sexual revolution that began in the Soviet Russia, obviously, cannot be considered accomplished, we would be shortsighted, if we did not try to learn certain lessons from it.

The grounds of the sexual revolution that began in the West in 1960s–1970s years, and in the 1980s has come down to the soviet society, can be divided into a) material, which primarily include the growth of well-being, the development of medicine, the spread of the nuclear family model (along with a decreasing importance of reproductive sexuality in comparison to recreational one), the division between family and productive function of individuals, and b) symbolic (political, value), among which we first of all distinguish the principle of liberalization of interpersonal relations and

individualization of the subject for which the sphere of eroticism turns from hidden and private to the field of self-realization and self-presentation. The sexual revolution used these grounds as its base, but at the same time we can say that the presence of these grounds allowed the sexual revolution to happen.

The main driving forces of the sexual revolution, according to I. Kon, were the youth and women [3]. The youth was striving for a radical transformation of the borders, out by the society to the possible forms of implementation of sexual energy, as well as to the permissible objects of love (as personal emotional attitude of affection and care). The women stood for *de facto* equality with men, including the emancipation of the practices of emotional and sexual life.

Major trends manifested in the course of the sexual revolution, of course, are not limited solely to the sphere of sexuality, but include also a wide range of social transformations, such as change of the institution of marriage and family relations, alteration of the system of gender stratification, gender identities and gender expectations, the revision of views on physicality, emotional life, speech practices and discursive problematization, and so on.

At the same time, trying to get rid of the old contradictions present in the fabric of social reality, the sexual revolution, in turn, generated a number of new contradictions related to the gaps (a) between the discarded value system of the past and the new one not yet arisen (axiological vacuum, which resulted in a number of problems, including the lack of standards of sexual health and sexual ethics), (b) between the generations, (c) between the representatives of different ethnic and religious groups, and (d) between the groups with different economic income (because it turned out that if sexuality is good, this good – or its necessary conditions – can be produced, which revealed a direct relationship between the consumption of this good and the economic success of a subject).

Meanwhile, dating the end of the sexual revolution with the specific time does not seem quite reasonable at the moment: continuing processes of liberalization of interpersonal (including matrimonial) relations – in particular, changing of the legal provisions regarding the institution of marriage, which takes place in a number of countries, – can be considered not only as a consequence of the past sexual revolution, but also as its new stages.

However, can we consider the achievements of the sexual revolution as a real liberation of an individual? It is a question that requires a special and comprehensive study. Speaking about the partial emancipation of eros instead of building a non-repressive civilization, H. Marcuse expresses concern that if the very order of society is repressive, partial exemption of eros only serves further enslavement of an individual, because this new order now offers him/her pleasure – but provided the person accepts the rest of the oppressive system [4]. If modern society produces and cultivates the sexual diversity, as, for example, Foucault proposes, it does not mean that because of this diversity, one becomes freer [5].

According to Marcuse, all revolutions are betrayed, and, as a rule, by the same forces that guided the revolutionary process the most. Every revolution begins with a desire for freedom, which fuels a revolutionary subject, and freedom, according to Marcuse, can sometimes really become a new state of the human existence, but at some point, gaining access to the desirable goods, these actors, who until recently lived for the revolution and for the dream of a new world, direct more and more resources to secure their own new position, and thus leading to the restoration of the system of oppression in its new form. Is the sexual revolution really a revolution aimed at the liberation of the individual? Or do the processes jointed under this bright label only represent a new stage in the evolution of the system of control, which, due to the level of economic well-being achieved in the developed industrial society, was able to abandon the primitive and rough forms of coercion?

III. FANTASMATIC PERFECTION AND SYMBOLIC CONTROL

Institutional transformations associated with the sexual revolution certainly imply transformations in the symbolic space. We will not decide here, which of them are originally primary and determinant in relation to the others. Let's just assume that their effects are mutual: changing social practices requires their understanding and legitimation by means of symbolic mechanisms, but at the same time, certain practices wouldn't have spread if at the level of symbolic dimension their subjects were not provided with the opportunity to discover the availability of these practices, or even the need for them.

The process of the sexual revolution includes a legitimation of sexuality not only as an object of speech in private space, an object of medical control or scientific research – but also as a sphere of concrete practices in which subjects find and realize themselves, while these practices become more open and public. This allows us to regard sexuality as a part not only of the deep "economy of bodies and desires" (Foucault), but also of very particular economic interaction. The principle of production, which, according to the repressive hypothesis (Marcuse), suppressed eros, subordinates sexuality and includes it in its cycles: henceforth this is the production of desire and pleasure. Without leaving the economy of power, eros finds itself subordinate to the power of economy.

Police control of external coercion, which J. Baudrillard denotes as a control "in the name of the father", is gradually replaced by a much milder control "in the name of the mother" [6]. However, softness (sometimes even tenderness) of the means of the new control in no way indicates a weakening of it – on the contrary, it is about subject's identifying the regulatory mechanisms with his/her own desire. Father's logic implies the existence of an external example for our desire, which is assimilated into our Superego, together with knowledge of the penalty to be applied to us in the case of our disobedience.

If, according to Freud, the subordination of a subject to the authoritarian instance is based on the identification of, for

example, with the figure of the leader (of the state, church, etc.) due to blurring of borders between Ego and Superego, then "logic of the mother" obstructs subject's attempts to distinguish the Self from the other components of his/her mental organization even more, because it makes the Ideal-Me incorporate certain elements of the biological and instinctive Id. True mother control does not assert some rule and does not threaten with a punishment, the mother control rests on the postulated love and care. It succeeds due to the fact that those desires, which, according to the mother instance, the subject should experience, are not the embodiment of the external will, but originally desires of the subject, which dissatisfaction will not lead to punishment, but will cost a subject of his own pleasure.

In addition to the narcissistic pleasure that comes from child's existence in a harmonious undifferentiation from the surrounding reality before the formation of binarities "Me/Not-Me" or "Me/The Other" (primary narcissism by Freud), as well as narcissus' pleasure who is well aware of his/her Self and cannot withdraw from a glance in a mirror, being totally immersed in the love of Self and desire to be loved by The Other (secondary narcissism by Freud), in a modern society where sexuality ceases to be the subject's private task limited to matrimonial space and becomes one of his/her fundamental social (structural) features, the subject learns to enjoy how well he/she fits not only the logic of desire of The Other, but also the logic of the existing social models of sexuality. The desire for such pleasure Baudrillard calls the tertiary narcissism.

At the same time, along with depersonalization of the imitative model (Marcuse's concept of depersonalization of the Superego) the significance of the personal will of The Other and particular factual correlations with it is also reducing. The symbolic increasingly segregates from real because of the fact that values largely lose their connection to their signified (the third order of simulacra in Baudrillard's theory). The ideal self-realization means either to achieve narcissistic perfection (absolute object of desire for any Other), or to possess this perfect object (and thus participation in its perfection through deprivation of this object, power over it, appropriation of it). Using the concept of J. Lacan, Baudrillard defines this symbol of fantasmatic perfection as "phallus", which becomes, according to him, the absolute signifying – that is the image of the perfect object of desire can actually refer to arbitrary values (practices, goods, subjects, etc.). The individual becomes desirable not only because of certain physiological or personal qualities (or even, for example, certain symbols of power), but also because of the possession of any symbols that are commonly regarded as "significant" in the current time in accordance to the structural law of value (by which, according to Baudrillard, the value does not become such through a certain demand, but rather precedes it) [6].

On the other hand, wishing to be desired, the subject is eager to acquire these symbols ("phallic substitutes"), what doesn't make his/her dependent involvement in economic relations less (and perhaps makes it even more) "serf" than when it was based on physical need. When the economy is sufficiently developed to deliver an individual "from the

realm of necessity", instead of liberation (from Marcuse's dream) an individual gets an illusory phallus and begins pursuing it desperately. However, in contrast to the satisfaction of biological and existential basic needs, the "phallus" is principally impossible to achieve – this acquisition of the fantasmatic perfection knows no end.

IV. PRODUCTIVENESS OF SEXUALITY IN THE REIGN OF SIMULACRA

Being included in the economic relations, sexuality, according to Baudrillard, becomes the principle of the system of political economy. As one of the key imperatives of the society is the everyone's pursuit of perfection – whereas the means of achieving this perfection are innumerable, but all have an economic price – this society can be characterized as a society of the symbolic "phallic exchange standard".

Sexuality by its very nature is always productive, since in its reproductive aspect it reproduces the human race, while the non-reproductive sexuality produces pleasure (not to mention the fact that any sexuality produces power relations). Such a productivity presupposes the incorporation of sexuality into the overall system of production, in addition, the producing sexuality itself starts to be produced by this system, along with other products when the subject is surrounded by numerous examples of sexual, which he or she should echo to successfully perform in accordance with his/her structural function.

Symbolic exchange, which involves actors, and at the same time, the exchange of desires and pleasures in this society is built primarily on the basis that corresponds the logic of efficient capitalist economy and aimed at maximizing profit while minimizing investment. This, according to Baudrillard, distinguishes it from the gift exchange principle known by so-called "primitive cultures", where it would be a shame to offer something that is not the most valuable to you as a gift, in response to what a gifted person had to try to present an even more valuable gift. Such archaic logic is alien to sexuality, in which the subject addresses, first of all, to him- or herself (to his/her own desire and pleasure), but familiar to love and transgressive eroticism in G. Bataille's understanding.

The prehistory of the "phallic exchange standard" dates back to modern times, when with the rise of a new class – the bourgeoisie – there grows a demand for symbols of nobility and wealth, such as those owned by the representatives of the aristocratic class. This leads to the spread of counterfeit, which Baudrillard describes as the first order of simulacra. With the advent of the industrial era symbols, indicating the social viability of the middle-class individual, are produced in a serial manner, and demonstrate referentiality not so much to something that is defined as "true" and "original" as to other series (second-order simulacra). Together with the establishing of the society of mass consumption and achieving well-being, when, as already mentioned, the basic needs of the individual, as a rule, are satisfied, the desire of the subject is increasingly transferred from the symbols that refer to the specific material objects or institutionalized

status positions to the symbols continually produced with the pre-established goal to be desirable.

V. PRINCIPLE OF TEMPTATION AS A CHALLENGE TO PHALLOCRATIC SUBJECTNESS

It's definitely worth special investigation, whether symbolic control cancels its classical mechanisms of power? We can assume that it doesn't, but they are certainly sidelined. However, in conditions that endanger the functionality of symbolic control, methods of oppressive power are taken into service again. In this case, the practices of symbolic control do not die away, but are redirected to the maintenance of the toughened political regulations.

Baudrillard's theory of symbolic control and society of "phallic exchange standard" as a whole does not negate the value of the repressive hypothesis, but suggests a lack of relevance of the repressive explanatory model in relation to modern society, that have changed from the time when the basic principles of this theory were formulated. Sexuality is transformed from the object of suppression into the means of control. However, since the domain of eros is not confined to sexuality, but also includes love as individual and personal attitude and transgressive eroticism, we should ask whether suppression is not maintained in their case? When sexuality becomes a structural function of a subject, doesn't it displace love and eroticism in his or her practices of self-realization?

Baudrillard suggests that sexuality with its well-lined productive should be counterposed by the logic of the principle of temptation that can reverse any logic [7]. The temptation reveals the power of the feminine, so those feminist movements that fights phallocracy as the dominance of the "male" truth and seek the "female" truth, and also the feminine nature, the feminine essence, according to Baudrillard, just create a female phallocracy. Woman has no nature, the essence of a woman is in having no essence, but that's just where her strength lies.

When a woman asserts her own nature, essence, a kind of logic, she falls to the register of male power and is subdued to the productive principle.

The feminine is a principle of appearances, uncertainty, so feminine contrasts the male discourse of essence with a game that is free to accept the strict masculine rules, but only playing, as long as they do not become boring and then abandon them – without any logic, without the need for some reasoning.

The logic of sexuality, as already mentioned, is the logic of production: it produces people, pleasure, meanings, truths, identities. The temptation in Baudrillard's theory is described as something on which the love is based (let us add: and eroticism as we understand it following Bataille). It demands: do not submit to the logic of the other, becoming the object for him (for her), and do not subordinate his (her) to yourself, but challenge his (her) subjectivity [8] according to the principle of the archaic gift. Can he or she answer with a greater temptation?

Castration of a subject, according to Baudrillard, is not what Freud or, say, K. Horney attributed to it, it is in our inability to give in to the temptation. Be tempted and thus feel how your very subjectivity staggers is the main fear of a contemporary individual.

Temptation always strikes with some inherent incompleteness, mystery, reality "in degree of $n-1$ ". It is this lack, the recognition of our own immanent inferiority that can break through the fantasmatic fortress of phallic perfection that the subject is obsessed today with. The omnipresent sexuality with its imperative to reach the maximum of reality (hyperreality), producing images "in degree $n+1$ ", seemingly leaves no room for the temptation and its mysteries: when you're given everything and a little more, they take everything away. However, as we share Baudrillard's belief, even in a contemporary society the temptation always finds a way, operating with signs of sexuality, but hinting: what if what I really mean by this is something completely different?

VI. CONCLUSION

The sexual revolution results in massive change in contemporary society including the formation of new institutional and cultural models and a variety of new practices for a subject of eros. While the "repressive hypothesis" once worked for a revolutionary revision of patriarchal and state authoritarianism and created a theoretical background for the sexual revolution itself, nowadays studies of sexual subjectiveness seem to be more heuristic based on concepts of not repression but control.

The control has also changed shifting mostly from external authoritarian patterns and institutionalized punishment to internal processes of identification and subjection in accordance with dominating symbolic structures where non-reproductive sexuality becomes one of the primary functions of social subject and an instrument of producing the illusory "phallic" perfection.

Sexuality is essentially productive (resulting in children or pleasure) and person's submission to it easily incorporates him or her into the economic logic of a late industrial society. However, love together with transgressive eroticism challenge our subjectness with temptation to see beyond the sexual context and explore the opportunity of practicing other identities in interpersonal relations than those of a producer and consumer of sexuality.

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