

Keti Chukhrov  
**Sexuality in a  
Non-Libidinal  
Economy**

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**Sexuality in a Non-Libidinal Economy**

1.

The historical socialist societies were usually severely criticized for their restrictions on sexual freedom. At the same time, the undergrounds of these same socialist societies were researched for manifestations of the sexuality that was supposedly suppressed because of ideological control. Researchers tried to discover the concealed practices of sexual liberation and subversive behavior, which would enable them to confirm that the expression of sexuality automatically subverts the authoritarian apparatus.

Usually, sexuality stands for freedom and emancipation. However, this stereotype ignores numerous contradictions in the concept of sexuality – sexuality might not necessarily be emancipatory. Foucault attributed the notion of sexuality to the emergence of bourgeois society. He located the origin of sexuality in the discourses that regulated health, clinical deviation, and medical care in post-disciplinary societies.

In the section called “Scientia Sexualis” in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault examines a very important stage in the history of Western European culture and science: when sexuality replaced the culture of Amor and Eros.<sup>1</sup> Sexuality didn’t so much bring with it bodily freedom from restrictions; rather, it introduced a language of scientific, juridical, medical, and psychical description – a language where perversion, punishment, analysis, knowledge, and pleasure are intertwined. The same language that maps and controls sexuality generates its seductive and subversive power. Thus, the superseding of Eros by individual sexuality goes hand in hand with the birth of bourgeois society; the aristocratic poetics of amorous sentiment were replaced by analytical stratification and the control of health, pleasure, and disease.

If we now turn to Deleuze’s treatment of the unconscious, we see that according to him, the unconscious is devoid of any psychoanalytical background and is dissipated on the surfaces of the social. The productive force of the unconscious is divorced from personal pleasure, but still resides in the realm of desire and its libidinality. The dimension of the libidinality of desire is ambivalent. It is far from being exclusively emancipatory. Desire stands for emancipation, but it is also permeated by the libidinal economy. What does this mean? Jean-François Lyotard’s research on libidinal economy can be of help here.<sup>2</sup> Lyotard exposes the libidinal complements to monetary exchange and the economy. The capitalist economy is a total externality, but our critique of it doesn’t situate us beyond its externality, because our impulses



Boris Mikhailov, *Untitled*, from the series *Suzi and Others*, date unknown. C-Print. Copyright of the artist.

and desires are unconsciously inscribed in the production of this alienated externality. We might think that we can resist the logic of capitalist production, but our libidinal pulsions happen to be in tune with this economy: we are unconsciously invested in it, and this is manifest in various forms of our behavior, labor, leisure, communication, exchange, and production. The macabre dimension of this argument is that according to Lyotard, the critique of capitalism itself is not at all free from the pulsions and desires that produce the capitalist condition. The libidinality scattered over the social body of capitalism permeates anything produced under its regime – including anticapitalist critique.

One can decipher to what extent capitalism is part and parcel of life by looking at the way *jouissance* and phantasms circulate within the framework of production and exchange. Lyotard sees in capitalism “the return, but unaffirmed and unrecognized, of what it rejects – libidinal intensity in the heart of neutralized exchanges.”<sup>3</sup> The nature of spending money, of exchange and production, reveals the way libido works. But it also confirms that capitalism is libidinally desired, even if it might be theoretically and conceptually denounced.

According to Lyotard, what we regard as creative intensity or subversive desire ultimately becomes currency and exchange. It’s not that we necessarily desire commerce; rather, we need the surplus attraction or estrangement that accompanies material culture and artistic production. Desire constructed via surplus is intertwined with surplus value, and hence with an economy molded via surpluses of various kinds – phantasmatic, sexual, libidinal, financial. That makes capitalism’s power stronger, but also reveals that *jouissance* (enjoyment) is not necessarily liberatory. Quite the opposite: it resides within the logic that seems to be contrary to it. Individually experienced pleasure or pulsion may be inseparable from the desire for power and domination.<sup>4</sup>

Although he mainly discusses capitalist production, Lyotard nevertheless extends this libidinal logic to any society, even to the symbolic order – religious acts, martyrology, and sacrifice. This means that even ostensibly non-libidinal acts, such as sacrificial deeds prompted by ethical or political convictions, can be approached from the point of view of libidinal drives and can be interpreted as transgressive realizations of enjoyment.

Such a totalizing attitude towards the instinctive and affective was also characteristic of Deleuze and Foucault. Although these authors uncovered the ambivalent character of the unconscious and sexuality, they nevertheless

reserved a subversive, emancipatory role for them. The components of capitalism were simultaneously its oblique subvertors. To deprive the economy of its libidinal resource would imply the termination and castration of desire altogether. Getting rid of the vicious part of libidinality would also get rid of its potential for creative fervor, since in a libidinal economy, creativity can only develop parallel to libidinal drives. Thus, capitalist alienation is fiercely criticized, but it nevertheless remains unconsciously seductive to its critics.

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Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Saint Teresa in Ecstasy*, 1647–52. Marble sculpture.

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## 2.

But what if the society rids itself of the tempting form of a commodity, of surplus value, and grounds economy on competition in production and distribution according to the necessities constructed by de-libidinalized habits of consuming?

In the work of Soviet Marxist philosophers and psychologists, especially Lev Vygotsky, one comes across an unconcealed mistrust of the role of the unconscious – mistrust of the idea that there might be a dichotomy between the unconscious and conscious regimes. In his book *Mishlenie i Rech (Thought and Language)* (1934), Vygotsky harshly criticizes Jean Piaget for his Freudian interpretation of the infant psyche.<sup>5</sup> Piaget points to the psyches of children under the age of seven as an example of the autonomy of a child’s syncretic thinking, its “autistic” fixation on the satisfaction of desires and pleasures. Piaget interprets this feature as

the mode of the unconscious as such. This stage of infancy represents the psychic condition directed to individual pleasure and detached from culture and reality. All social, logical, and generalizing functions emerge later.

Contrary to the way the pleasure principle is treated in the theory of the unconscious, Vygotsky often paraphrases *pleasure* as *necessity* (потребность) and inscribes it into the social and collective dimension. Generally speaking, in works of Soviet philosophy in which the impact of the unconscious, pleasure, libidinality, and individual psychology was debated (works by, for example, Evald Ilyenkov, Mikhail Lifschitz, and Mikhail Bakhtin), the emphasis was always on the fact that social functions precede the instincts and hence the regimes of the unconscious. For example, Vygotsky insists that before the “autistic” period, the child is already inscribed into sociality; even the egocentric syncretic modes of speech and thinking are part of a more complex developmental teleology. Within the framework of such a teleology, individual pleasure, desire, and its satisfaction are complements to the broader demands of the social, even at a very early stage. By contrast, in Piaget’s system and in psychoanalysis, the principle of pleasure, the libidinal, and the drives precede objective reality, and are incompatible alterities in relation to consciousness.

Vygotsky’s critical claim against psychoanalysis is that it turns the pleasure principle into an autonomous vital resource (*primum movens*, as Vygotsky put it), when it could have just remained a biologically auxiliary condition. Vygotsky insists that the attachment or detachment of a child to the implementation of social procedures is dependent on the social conditions of his or her upbringing – on whether the child is raised in the family or in broader collectivities. This presupposes the acquisition of cultural and social habits by way of collectivity, rather than via the nuclear family. It means that even when a child is confined to the father-mother nucleus, he or she acquires qualities general for humanity and society, since these qualities have been constructed diachronically over the course of human history. From this standpoint – a standpoint that obsessed Soviet Marxist philosophy – so-called polymorphous sexuality and the whole set of sexual perversions ascribed to the child by psychoanalysis can be regarded as superfluous. Perversions and sexuality can be ascribed to the child only if they unfold via the linguistic articulation and registration of them – which the child, at least in the pre-oedipal (or even oedipal) stage, is not able to do.

When Piaget autonomizes pleasure and

detaches it from logic and reality, he places pleasure (which Vygotsky calls the satisfaction of needs) prior to the child’s later socializing adjustment to reality. By contrast, Vygotsky insists that the satisfaction of needs (which Piaget calls the regime of pleasure) cannot be divorced from the social adaptation to reality.

According to Vygotsky, pleasure is not just about receiving pleasure; rather, it is inserted into a more complex teleological set of references to reality. This logic is diametrically opposed to the logic of libidinal economy that characterizes capitalist society. Socialist “reality” is already de-libidinalized (which does not at all mean that it is de-eroticized). Desire and pleasure can only be understood as necessities to be implemented. The gap between the need for pleasure and the necessity for common values is minimized. A society in which production tries to attain the conditions of use value rids itself of the surplus economy – both in desire, as well as in consuming and communication. However, the rejection of surplus doesn’t at all imply the termination of the extreme, the intense, and the excessive. On the contrary, excessive action is manifested elsewhere – in labor, ethical deeds, social responsibility, art, and culture. It becomes the zeal and toil of dedication rather than pleasure or *jouissance*.

Thus, under the conditions of an economy aimed at use value, desire stops being libidinal. By contrast, in Lyotard’s case, libidinality is extended to all acts, even symbolically motivated ones like sacrifice, the sublime, and love.

### 3.

Lyotard expertly describes the way the commodity form permeates bodies and their impulses. This is why the critique of the commodity cannot overthrow the regime of capital and the libidinal economy: because the body, the unconscious, and desire remain aroused by the commodity. This does not, of course, take place in a straightforward way. The point here is that the commodity form is constructed so that it serves and extends the phantasmatic drives of the unconscious. If we now turn to Piaget’s infantile pleasure principle (as criticized by Vygotsky), we find there the idea that pleasure can only be satisfied through the deformation of reality and its reduction to the ego’s drive for pleasure. Egocentric phantasms prevail over reality, such that the “autistic” thought aimed at pleasure never deals with “truth” or “the real.”

But Vygotsky, along with many other Soviet thinkers, tried to prove that the satisfaction of desire should not be opposed to the adjustment to reality. Necessity can be realized in the

domain of reality, not counter to it, as Piaget claims. Even the “autistic” thought can be a part of a child’s broader thinking. Similarly, there is no abstract thought without a relation to reality, to concreteness. Both the unconscious and the speculative or logical regimes are part and parcel of reality. Desire is tied to reality rather than to phantasms; it functions within the regime of necessity. According to Vygotsky, detaching pleasure and needs from the accommodation to reality would endow them with metaphysical import, which would in turn completely detach the realistic principle and “realistic thinking” (the opposite of autism and its pleasure principle) from needs (since the needs are pleasures and are considered to be phantasmatic).<sup>6</sup> In this situation, both realms – “pure thinking” and pleasure would be deprived of reality altogether.<sup>7</sup>

To repeat: for Vygotsky and his Soviet colleagues, pleasure is described as a need to be satisfied. This means that pleasure is not epistemologically separate from necessity. It also implies the non-libidinality of an economy based on necessity and its unmediated satisfaction (this unmediatedness is actually the quality of use value). By contrast, in a libidinal economy, pleasure, even when it is satisfied, is embedded in the diversification of modes of mediation – mediation between the drives and their satisfaction. It is precisely this gap that is phantasmatic and that produces the surplus.

#### 4.

Historically, in socialist countries, extensive underground economies developed to meet the demand for alluring commodities from abroad. Western researchers often ask why the governments of these socialist countries didn’t try to satisfy this demand themselves. Wouldn’t it have been profitable for the socialist economies to satisfy this desire for beauty, technical sophistication, success, and fashion? Perhaps, they may speculate, there was some ideological imperative to keep the whole spectrum of production, trade, and services plain enough to evade the attractiveness generated by a surplus economy – attractiveness that first takes the form of a phantasm, and is then embodied in a commodity. I put this question to Andrey Kolganov, a well-known economist who researches the Soviet economy. He answered that there was never any deliberate social engineering through unreliable services or intentionally unattractive and poorly designed commodities. Rather, this situation was the consequence of a planned economy that did not so much aim to satisfy individual, specific demands; rather, it was constructed to satisfy basic shared (and hence general) necessities.

Commodities were radically de-personified. Paradoxically, this de-personified, de-privatized material culture met the demand for de-alienation among individuals, who no longer needed any privacy or individualized space.

In this economy, the object became the tautological realization of its idea – as if it were possible to imagine the chairness of a chair or to wear the coatness of a coat. Interestingly, this applied even to food, which had to be healthy, but deprived of any specific gourmet features, meaning that one had to eat the cheeseness of cheese – i.e., one kind of it, not its varieties. This asceticism was not predesigned ideologically. The de-libidinized commodity was just a consequence of the planned economy. This quality was manifested in a number of works by Moscow Conceptualists. To designate this anti-commodity condition, Ekaterina Degot used a term invented by Boris Arvatov: “the object as comrade.” This referred to the de-commodified and thus de-libidinized quality of objects produced under socialism.<sup>8</sup>

These non-libidinal conditions of production implied an economy that was not economical, that did not aim at economic growth: economy and production were had to be subordinated to social and cultural criteria. Production served the interests of society’s shared values. That is why social and economic efficiencies were not treated as one and the same thing.

Here we encounter an interesting paradox. The society that tried to de-alienate social relations produced extremely unattractive commodities and artifacts of material culture (which even compelled the Moscow Conceptualists to invent a concept for a Soviet-produced object: *Plokhaya Vesh* – bad thing). By contrast, the society in which production was by definition based on alienated labor and social relations generated commodities that aroused intimacy, desire, and comfort – i.e., attitudes towards the commodity-object that frame it as something lovable and unique. The anti-commodity was too general, since it was the embodiment of the idea of a basic need, whereas the capitalist commodity acquired the qualities of an unalienated, desired thing. The socialist “object as comrade” was bad and undesired, as if proving that in a new society based on equality, desire should be evacuated altogether.

Later, this unattractiveness of Soviet material culture was characterized by its critics as the embodiment of inhuman, abstract mass production. But maybe the fact that objects were produced unattractively and badly didn’t at all annul the principle that had been developed by Boris Arvatov and the Productivists – namely, that precisely the generalized, communalized object that doesn’t meet the demands of

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**ТРУДЯЩИЕСЯ**  
**НЕ СТРАШНЫ ДОРОГОВИЗНА И НЭП**  
**ПОКУПАЙТЕ!**  
**ДЕШЕВЫЙ ХЛЕБ!**

**СЕЯННЫЙ**  
**ОТ 15% СКИДКИ!**  
**ЧЕРНЫЙ**  
**СИТНЫЙ**  
**БУЛКИ**

**ВО ВСЕХ**  
**МАГАЗИНАХ И КИОСКАХ**

**МОССЕЛЬПРОМА**  
**В ДВУХ ШАГАХ ОТ ЛЮБОГО ДОМА!**

This poster was designed by Alexander Rodchenko in 1923.

personal taste or phantasmatic desire is able to de-alienate communication among its users (former consumers). This is because personal desire is refused in favor of impersonally deployed de-alienation.

Thus, the unattractiveness of Soviet goods was not the ideological imperative of the Party. Rather, it was the consequence of economic shortages that resulted from the demand for equal distribution for all. Modesty and asceticism were an inevitable consequence of social equality. By contrast, under capitalism and its forms of sexualization, the unconscious oedipal sexuality of the family is guaranteed by “nice things” (commodities of quality), which shape personal imaginaries. Without the fetishism of commodities, it would be impossible to design any constructs or languages of sexuality. This is one of the important issues ignored by Freud.

To repeat: according to a widely held belief, sexuality during historical socialism was suppressed by authoritarian restrictions on various freedoms. But, the argument goes, since sexuality is the epitome of liberation, and since sexuality can never be absent from any society, sexuality is always at least latently embedded in any society as the potential for freedom – freedom from prejudices, power, control, and so forth. However, judging by statistical data, the rate of sexual intercourse under socialism may have been even higher than under capitalism.<sup>9</sup>

But when we identify sexuality with freedom on the one hand, and with sexual intercourse on the other, one thing is overlooked: sexuality is not the same as statistics about sexual relations. If we accept this, then ignoring sexuality does not mean the end of sex. Libidinal drive, pleasure, and sexuality are not directly connected to the practice of genital sexuality. Aaron Schuster, in his foreword to Andrei Platonov’s pamphlet “Antisexus,” emphasizes this feature – namely, the incongruence between genital sexuality and the libidinal drives as theorized in Freud’s interpretation of the libido.<sup>10</sup> Schuster first comments on Stanislaw Lem’s novel *Sexplosion*, in which the extinction of genital function due to the drug “Nosex” only shifts desire into the oral drive, i.e., perversion. Then he quotes Freud from *Civilization and Its Discontents*: “Sometimes one seems to perceive that it is not only the pressure of civilization but something in the nature of the function [of libido] itself which denies us full satisfaction and urges us along other paths.”<sup>11</sup>

In other words, Freudian interpretation (and many other interpretations that follow Freud) presents the libido as a negative drive that results from the fact that genital intercourse is not necessarily supposed to stand for sexuality

or libidinality. In the quotation above, Freud describes the surplus element, that very “other path,” which constructs desire and pleasure and nourishes the economy of libidinality. Sexuality and libidinal pulsion can be present in things not connected semantically with sexuality at all, and vice versa: genital intercourse can be deprived of the languages of sexuality.

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Odessa, 1982. Photo: Jana Berri.

## 5.

The economy of use value eliminated sexuality in socialist culture, and it was superseded by the languages of enthusiasm and amorousness. But why couldn’t the rhetoric of enthusiasm and amorousness accommodate the languages of sexuality? We know from Foucault that the languages of sexuality are generated to control sexual life, and that together with the clinical function, they turn sexuality into surplus pleasure. By the same token, the unconscious as a language had been constructed to grasp what is beyond consciousness – to treat psychic deviations using clinical methodology. However, over the course of the history of psychoanalytic



and post-psychoanalytic thought, what used to be the symptoms of a disease in the realm of the unconscious became the vocabulary for creative, nonrational, and hence liberating forms of behavior, production, and communication. The Soviet mistrust of the unconscious was never a mistrust of its clinical, therapeutic, and research function. Rather, it was a mistrust of a certain dominant ideology of the unconscious in which all drives are reduced to suppressed enjoyment, acquire the status of an *a priori* principle, and thereby take on emancipatory potentialities.

In Lyotard's interpretation of pleasure, the totalizing impact of the libidinal and the unconscious is always present. Its surplus appears as a macabre force. However, the evacuation of the libidinal surplus is impossible, since it is impossible to terminate the pleasure principle. Therefore, the viciousness of the libidinal economy should be intensified to make it appear even more vicious, so that an unimaginable or inhuman *jouissance* will subvert or transgresses the imaginable pleasure. This would mean that, even when pleasure becomes a vice that might be ousted in favor of religion, love, ideology, or any sacrificial procedure, the pleasure principle and the surplus economy are sustained. According to this logic, a saint is a prostitute. But a resisting worker is also a prostitute. Every political economy is libidinal, since any excess can only be libidinal. Hence, the sublime also belongs to the category of unattained *jouissance*, since it is imagined at the phantasmatic level.

However, I want to assert that the shift away from capitalist production led to the termination of surplus value and its libidinal dimension.

Within the framework of psychoanalysis, phenomena related to the superego – the ideal, love, death, the ethical deed – become so unattainable that they acquire either a repressive and censoring function, or are only approached through the regime of transgression. This regime converts these conscious phenomena into individualized *jouissance*, thus drawing them into the realm of the unconscious and turning them into drives. These phenomena thus either remain in the regime of pleasure and *jouissance*, or are labeled as repressive. This is the generally acknowledged constellation of psychoanalysis.

The characteristics of a non-libidinal economy described earlier suggest that in the Soviet context, this constellation functioned differently. Here, sublime phenomena are not regarded as the superego's counteraction against pleasures and freedom, nor as transgressive acts that inscribe them into the pleasure principle in twisted way. Instead, all the sublime phenomena

that are usually symbolic – death, idea, love, solidarity, ethical deeds – become part of objective reality, precisely because the allure of the commodity is removed from them. Such a disposition changes the form and constellation of desire, the role of sexuality, and the attitude towards reality. Along with such a change, the dichotomy according to which freedom, desire, and drives belong to the unconscious, while the superego and consciousness belong to power, ideology, and apparatuses that censure the unconscious, is also sublated.

If in capitalism even the sublime acquires libidinal qualities, in socialism the object tends to equal its use value, tends to stop being a commodity, and doesn't seduce or tempt anymore. In addition, the idea (e.g., the idea of communism) is not something remote, imaginary, or phantasmatic – not the voice of the Big Other – but instead permeates reality and becomes an exchangeable, concrete, everyday value. The further distancing of already alienated phenomena is the aesthetic device of capitalist society. By contrast, in socialist society sublime and unimaginable phenomena pervade the everyday as if they were common, unremarkable things.

What happens to sexuality under such conditions? Sexual intercourse is of course present, but it becomes one of the modes of communication within the framework of existential necessity – be it love, friendship, or even just physiological need. That is, it is inscribed into the more general framework, so that the elements of sexuality do not acquire any surplus value that would make them seductive in a specific way. Therefore, it is not necessary to represent or circulate sexuality's sovereign images as the simulacra of desire, separate from their tie to existential or ontic necessity. Sexuality is just one of the modes of social production, amorous attachment, and communication: it doesn't have an autonomous value or a seductive allure. It is inscribed into the collective Eros, presupposing joy rather than enjoyment (*jouissance*).

The way Andrei Platonov depicts sexual intercourse in his novella *Djan* is interesting. In the midst of their exodus, the starving people treat sex as a basic necessity, in the same way they treat sleep and nourishment. This necessity isn't framed as an alternative to love or the sublime. The sublime is not detached from the mundane, but is implanted into matter and bodies, even when these bodies are on the verge of physical collapse. Likewise, in Platonov's short story "The River Potudan," when Nikita, the husband of Ljuba, first has sexual intercourse with her after hesitating to do so for a long time, Platonov describes it as a "poor and inevitable



pleasure, from which Nikita didn't acquire more joy than he hitherto experienced with Ljuba without it."<sup>12</sup>

It is traditionally thought that Platonov's writing is confined to the sexual part of love relationships. He is often juxtaposed with Alexandra Kollontai's anti-puritanic standpoint. According to Aaron Schuster,

Platonov and Kollontai condense two separate strands of sexual theorizing that equally belong to the revolutionary project and express its emancipatory aspirations: on the one hand, a male-dominated ethic of sacrifice in the service of constructing another world, and on the other, the invention of a new "love-comradeship" based on pleasure, equality and solidarity, to replace intimate relations dominated by the bourgeois property form.<sup>13</sup>

However, Platonov's novels, while teeming with sex scenes, are either completely devoid of the phantasm of libidinality, or depict the libidinal features characteristic of sexuality as the squalor of a lonely individual unable to overcome his dependence on drives. And Alexandra Kollontai's manifesto "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle," which is considered to be an open declaration of sexual liberation, does not at all contradict to the non-libidinal form of Eros.<sup>14</sup> Kollontai's criticism of the bourgeois family nucleus is fallaciously regarded as a simple legitimizing of free sex, when her claim is in fact more complex and demanding than that.

Although the political means for achieving the goals stated in Kollontai's manifesto are left quite vague, its futurological motivation is clearly articulated. Kollontai calls for the convergence of comradeship and political Eros, which would reconstruct the logic of individualized sexual communication. If the collective were motivated by de-alienated production and social relations, then sex and love relationships would stem from political Eros rather than from an individual's demand to get pleasure from another individual. Kollontai's quest for freedom in sex does not so much legitimize what might be regarded as adultery; rather, it calls for creating new terms of friendly solidarity, which can only come about after the creation of new economic and social conditions. According to Kollontai, the same bourgeois society that makes an individual feel solitary and alienated also provokes him to seek another individual "soul," privatize that "other soul," and thus ground love in the imposition of obligations on another person. Kollontai insists that the abolition of private property would eliminate the privatizing attitude towards the "other" in love relationships. But only in a

communist economy would it be possible to transform love relationships and sexual intercourse from "blind physical" acts into a "creative principle." Her manifesto is not so much an apologia for free sex as it is an appeal to transform society so that it acquires a sense of solidarity, which would in turn have a transformative impact on the human psyche. However, this change in the human psyche can only take place as a consequence of the abolition of private property and the transformation of social and economic relations. Thus, the destruction of marriage and the family nucleus is not aimed at liberalizing sexual relations, but rather at constructing the potential for class consciousness. It is aimed at producing a society of common interest that supersedes individual desire. New modes of non-privatized sexuality and changes in gender dispositions are subsequent to this social and political transformation, not vice versa as implied by contemporary subversive practices that unfold *within* the framework of the libidinal economy.

Kollontai's program – quite in tune with Platonov's communist sexuality – is aimed at reducing the libidinal and seductive complement to sexuality, so that sexuality stops being seductive and mysterious – so that it stops being sexual.

The problem, however, is that the loss of the libidinal phantasm of desire would be much scarier and more repressive than any puritan restriction on concrete sexual relations. Under capitalism, the cessation of libidinal striving seems impossible. This is why even legalized sexual services cannot be just services or a form therapy: they are compelled to engage the surplus imagery of seduction.

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1  
Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1976).

2  
See Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (London: Continuum, 2004).

3  
Ibid., 87.

4  
“The Desire Named Marx,” chap. 3 in *ibid.*, 94–145.

5  
Lev Vygotsky, chap. 2 in *Mishlenie i Rech (Thinking and Speaking)* (Moscow: Labyrinth, 1999 (1934)), 20–73. English translation at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/words/>

6  
With the phrase “realistic thinking,” Vygotsky refers to thought that is not “autistic” and self-referential – thought that is counter-individualistic and tied to reality.

7  
Vygotsky, *Mishlenie i Rech*, 50–73.

8  
Degot, “Ot Tovara k Tovarishu” (From commodity to comrade), *Logos* 5/6 (2004) [http://www.ruthenia.ru/logos/number/2000\\_5\\_6/2000\\_5-6\\_04.htm](http://www.ruthenia.ru/logos/number/2000_5_6/2000_5-6_04.htm)

9  
See the documentary *Liebte der Osten Anders? - Sex im Geteilten Deutschland* (Do communists have better sex?: Sex in divided Germany) (Germany: MDR, 2007).

10  
Aaron Schuster, “Sex and Antisex,” *Cabinet* 51 (2013).

11  
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955), 105.

12  
Andrei Platonov, “The River Potudan,” in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. Robert and Elizabeth Chandler and Angela Livingstone (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2008).

13  
Schuster, “Sex and Antisex.”

14  
Kollontai, “Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle,” in *Alexandra Kollontai: Selected Writings*, trans. Alix Holt (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977).