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Review of Srećko Horvat, *The Radicality of Love* (Polity, 2016), 120 pages, £40.00

Reviewed by Julia Carter

Keywords

Love, revolution, desire, sex, radicality

What is love without revolution? And what is revolution without love? Horvat attempts to reveal the radicality, or radical potential, of love in his new book, connecting the emotion/value with revolutionary movements and radical moments. Through the book, the argument emerges that revolution and love must be symbiotic: 'true' revolution should be inspired by love and 'true' love must be revolutionary. Thus love and revolution become interchangeable, both are hard work and require dedication and commitment to a cause. In the closing pages of the book, revolution is elevated still further and in its idealised all-encompassing form is equated by Horvat to the godly realms of devotion. The main problem is that, while ambitious in scope, the argument falls down due to a lack of theorisation of love throughout the book; while elsewhere, there has been considerable thought given to the nature and scope of love: see for example Hardt and Negri (2009), May (2011), Langford (1999), Evans (2003), Secomb (2007).

The book begins with the question of why love is so absent in discussions of contemporary upheavals across the globe (an observation which parallels similar findings of the absence of love in relationship narratives: Carter, 2013). Horvat's aim, however, is not simply to write love back into these accounts but rather to point towards the need for love to be reinvented (revolutionised) in order for it to have true meaning; but more than this, the revolution and reinvention of love should also be a concomitant process in any revolutionary processes. Horvat draws on Kierkegaard when asserting that habit is the enemy of love, and at the same time, warns against the all-encompassing potentiality of love. The argument proceeds that to conceive of a political, radical, notion of love in and love of revolution leads to a radical universality: 'to truly know love means to come to the level of universality' (16). This premise sets up the structure for the remainder of the book with attempts to highlight both the need for, and the existence of, a universal 'true' love in popular/revolutionary culture. To reinvent the world, we must also reinvent love, regardless of context, history and position.

The next instalment of the book proposes to situate this discussion of love within a (particularly Western) 'post-modern' outlook of love in a time of 'cold intimacies' (Illouz, 2007) and 'liquid love' (Bauman, 2003). The basis for this theoretical contribution is provided in an amusing personal anecdote from Horvat's experiences on a beach in Croatia; an extract that neatly illustrates the point that serious discussions of 'free love' have become sadly caricatured: ultimately free bodies are reduced to 'fuck bodies'. This transformation of 'serious discussion' to 'pseudo-revolutionary' frivolity is illustrated through various cultural products: Adair's novel *The Holy Innocents* (1988) turned into the film *The Dreamers*; the two 2013 films *Her* and *Nymphomaniac*; the 2011 film *Shame*; and the social media app Grindr. The integration between a political ideology of love and these media and other cultural artefacts is fascinating and successfully accomplished. The question, however, is to what extent are we really living in an age of 'cold intimacies' and 'liquid love'? For the counter to this argument that love (sex) has become non-revolutionary and at the same time frivolous ('fuck bodies'), is sustained evidence of the remaining importance of (same- and opposite-sex) marriage, intimate, monogamous relationships, love and commitment (see for example, Carter, 2012; Gabb and Fink, 2015; van Hooff, 2013). At this point, we may also start to question the universality of revolutionary love, when the author is largely concerned here with Western thought and cultural products.

The book does move outside this Western framework later to consider the cultural revolution in Iran and the outcome of this significant lifestyle upheaval for Iranians. Here the discussion moves into the realms of desire, linking this with architecture, music, performance and other cultural products

(including language). In this context, love is reinvented in its suppression of desire which has to be expressed in secret; the political (or wealthy) elite are the only ones who can relatively freely access these forbidden desires. In this situation, freedom is the potential to desire, not the desiring itself. When considering the October Revolution, this notion of desire is discussed in a more personal context, focusing on the intimate life of Lenin and his role in regulating love at both the individual and state level. In this way we learn about the orientation of Leninist leadership towards sex and love: which at first is liberal in response to demands for equality and communitarian ambitions but relatively quickly, sex is recognised as the powerful and dangerous force that it can be. Sex is particularly dangerous because of its energy consuming qualities, energies which are necessarily diverted away from collective activities. Ideally all energies should be focused on the proletarian revolution. Thus, again, the book elucidates a repression of desire, sex, love, at the hands of a controlling regime who clearly see the (counter-)revolutionary potential in these forces. These ruling parties are intervening at the most personal, intimate level in their subjects' lives. Revolution, then, must also involve a reinvention, revolution, of love, not just at the ideological level, but at the level of real-life intimacies. Love is and should be feared, by those who wish to gain and retain power.

The focus on personal narrations of revolutionary love become even more prescient in the subsequent discussion of Che Guevara and his political and personal orientations towards love. For Guevara then, love (which is not so far from hate) must be the guiding principle in any 'true revolutionary': but this love must be for the people and the cause, not at the mundane level of couple love. The example of Che Guevara is interesting, of course, because of his struggle precisely with this divide: his love for the cause and love for an intimate partner- in his case for Aleida March. Ultimately the conclusion seems to be that true love and true revolution go hand in hand- one should come in conjunction with the other, they are not either/or but both/and (or and/or as Horvat puts it). A true revolution not only also must involve a revolution in love but it must be guided by love for the cause. A reorientation to such principles of love will bring true revolution: 'true love is the creation of a new world' (119). What this section really seems to highlight is that the relationship between love and revolution is a complex one and critically involves: personal sacrifice, ideology, desire, sex, hate and transcendence. Ultimately, the 'true' radicality of love emerges in the devotion both to an intimate and to revolution, at once. In this way Horvat notes that Che Guevara comes very close to the ideal revolutionary. What is also striking in the chapter, however, is the absence of links to existing literature which deals successfully with the conceptualisation of love. As a result, the nature of love described by Horvat is complex, messy and somewhat arbitrary. Reviewing Tamboukou's (2013) considerations of the importance of romantic letter writing in constructing the force of political, radical ideas would have provided much needed theorisation, for example.

The final dimension of love Horvat tackles is the biological/bodily/embodiment of love: sex. Horvat demonstrates, in the final instalment of his thesis, the radical nature of the body when it is used as a revolutionary tool (think the hunger strikes of IRA prisoners or suffragettes). But when it comes to sex, bodies are too easily co-opted into 'revolutionary' movements that turn out to be no such thing. And this is dangerous; sex has to be truly revolutionary, otherwise 'the exchange of women and men is nothing else but the application of the bourgeois exchange principle under pseudorevolutionary auspices' (146). Love, and sex in particular, can too easily distract from the cause of the revolution. Love of/for the revolution, therefore, has to be equal to love of/for the other, for revolution to be effective. We must then see this love as sacrificial, directed outward, rather than selfish and directed exclusively at another; for 'To be devoted to the Beloved one and the Revolution at the same time is the true Radicality of Love' (162). Horvat finishes by using the allegory of the holy (Christian) trinity to understand the relationship between two individuals and the revolution: love is non-directional but relational between the three elements, God is revolution and love co-exists between all.

The weaving of personal accounts of love of revolutionary figures with a political ideology of love provides a unique purpose and an extremely interesting narrative. Various accounts of love are provided at state and personal level, in different, various contexts and across varied temporal horizons. At a time of seemingly hate-fuelled politics and hate-ridden societies, this is a powerful call to love and its revolutionary potential for reinvention. Love provides the key to solidarity politics, it's not easy, it takes commitment, but it is worth the risk. This very romantic, risky, vision of love has

been acknowledged by others in the field of sociology (most notably Jackson, 1993; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Langford, 1999). But we should also not overlook the notable importance of habit in the practice of love. For Horvat is not just interested in the political application of love but also the practice between intimates as part of the revolutionary movement. And when we look at this, what we find is that habit is actually a rather important aspect of love (see Miller (1998) and the importance of shopping to demonstrate love for children, or Gabb and Fink (2015) and the importance of a cup of tea, for example). It may not be revolutionary but habit is a part of, not the downfall of, the practice of love.

This book then opens up a space to think about the role of love in and with revolution- at the ideological as well as personal level of social movements, moments and upheavals. In this respect, Horvat offers significant food for thought regarding questions of biopolitics, social movement theory, and philosophies of love, exchange, and social change. The book weaves together a story of love and revolution focusing on the potential and dangers of love through desire, sex, distraction and sacrifice. This is all set within a scene of fragile bonds and fleeting connections. Fundamental questions are raised regarding the nature of love today and its status as revolutionary potential. Yet this is where the argument begins to unravel; it rests upon the existence of 'emotional capitalism' where emotional and economic relationships come to define each other (Illouz, 2007)- an argument founded upon the analysis of self-help literature and women's magazines. Extensive social research using interviews with romantic couples does not find such 'cold intimacies' in the lived experience. Moreover, we may find significant problems with Horvat's linked argument that the 'revolutionary aim at changing everyday life was perverted into the postmodern variety of lifestyles: it is not subversive anymore, at least in the Western world, neither to be gay or a transvestite, nor to have regular sex with two people at the same time or ten' (29). Even if we put aside the very real subversion still involved in practising transvestitism and the remnants of homophobia in the West, the act of extra-marital sex ('sex with two people at the same time or ten...') is also extremely, and increasingly subversive (at least in the UK- see the Natsal surveys for more information).

While a revolutionary book in and of itself, it could be suggested that *The Radicality of Love* overlooks some key points about the practice of love (I acknowledge that this is not the primary concern of the book but it is a part of it and therefore important): first, 'The worst thing that can happen to love is habit' (4). Perhaps love as habit forestalls love as revolution but without love as habit how could love actually be sustainable? And second, love currently has no radical potential because of the 'age of cold intimacies', but this ignores the evidence that love can still be radical today, we only have to think about the remaining taboos around incest or bestiality to see this. But love/sex outside of marriage is increasingly a normative taboo also. In this regard, certainly anything does not go.

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