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“No more mothers, women and girls, let’s destroy the families!”

was an invitation to
the gesture of breaking the expected chains of events,
to release the compressed potentialities.

It was a blow to the fucked up love affairs, to
ordinary prostitution.

It was a call at overcoming the couple as elementary unit in
the

management of
alienation.

— Tiqqun, “How to?”

CLÉMENCE X. CLEMENTINE
AND ASSOCIATES FROM THE
INFINITE VENOM GIRL GANG

Libidinal flows cut through the social world. Amorous and
sexual relations

do not exist in some domain safely taped off from the rest of
society. Rather they are constituent elements of nearly every
aspect

of social life. Desire flows and circulates amongst places of employment, intellectual debates, political organizing, artistic circles, playgrounds, and cemeteries. The elderly patient grabs at the breast of a nurse hunched over him. A governmental official strips his newly hired intern down to her leopard print thong during an important briefing in his office. The incarcerated man holds his hand up to the glass of the visiting booth, attempting to touch his wife after twenty years of their bodily separation. These flows of libidinal desire operate within and amongst broader social mechanisms, such that they help animate the dynamics of economic and political life. Often a locus of politics, desire permeates the so-called “public” terrain. Patriarchy incessantly subjects these flows of desire to a system of organization, a logic that subverts the desiring flows against themselves. This channeling and organization of sex and amorous relations I will refer to as the logic of the couple — that which funnels, simplifies, and reduces amorous desire to the needs of patriarchy within the capitalist mode of production. This logic assumes that women have but a single site for the fulfillment of their social and

sexual desires, that being a romantic relationship with a man.
The
couple functions as the threshold, the admission fee, the
golden key
that allows a woman to participate in the social world. The
couple
promises that, upon entering its grasp, one will no longer
suffer from
alienation, from isolation, from boredom, from rootlessness.
The
couple grants a woman personhood and social visibility. She
obtains
a title, a temporality, a space through the couple. Marriage
enshrines
this logic and its perpetuation of the specific form assumed
by patriarchy
under capitalism.
The action and the discourse within patriarchal social rela-
tions emerge
from a group of men interested in each other. In intellectual,
political,
or artistic circles, a cadre of men often monopolize the ability
to participate in the production of events or ideas, which is
not to
say that they do anything particularly interesting. Patri-
archy has
systematically excluded women from the action and the dis-
course,
consigning them as a class to perform the unwaged work of
social
reproduction. Rather than an essentialist concept, the cate-
gory of
woman stems from a gendered mode of exploitation and rel-
egates

certain types of labor to a private, unwaged sphere. While women busily work waged jobs in addition to performing domestic work, men create the sphere of public life in order to insulate themselves from coming to terms with their banality and superfluity. Men grant women access to the action and the discourse by developing sexual relations with men from this circle. Un-coupled women, those loose dogs, remain on the periphery, always at a distance from the space where debates, projects, and events are played out. The couple acts as a social form that requires women, in order to participate in whatever practice or domain they desire, to attach themselves to men via the couple mechanism. The couple-form often constitutes the single device that protects a woman from the misogyny of a group of men. Who's that? Oh, I think it is Zach's girlfriend, Ben's ex. Women become known for their relationships to men, not for their contributions to intellectual or political life. Women's lives diminish to their roles as the wife of R or the mistress of J, not poets, theorists, or revolutionaries in their own right. Women choose different strategies when faced with patriarchal social relations and the logic of the couple. A woman who goes after

transforms and increases the space available for living in, it destroys the foundations and economic function of the family. Also, as it is the realization of the human community, it destroys the need for a refuge within that community.”⁶ As a historically bounded relation, the internal contradictions of the couple-form will one day arrive at their conclusion, and love will no longer know the territoriality of promises, gender, or subject. In addition to our struggles in the streets and at the printing presses, we open up an additional front against coupledness. Feminist struggle remains the ever-enticing horizon before us. I strapped my boyfriend with homemade explosives and blew him up. His flesh spread everywhere. So did my affection. I'm sick of love. Let's fall in politics. ⁶ Dominique Karamazov, “Misère du Féminisme” in *La Guerre Sociale*, No. 2 (Paris, 1978) trans. Jean Weir as *The Poverty of Feminism* (London: Elephant Editions, 1998).

Construct autonomous feminist spaces where women produce their own action and discourse. Banish the mediation by men of relationships between women. Prevent a single relationship from alienating oneself from the processes that contribute to liberation and the

4 Guy Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2010) 51.

5 Mario Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1980) 56.

abolition of capitalism and patriarchy. Let no single bond stand in the way of friendship, organizing, and advancing the interests of the class.

Make intelligible the movement of history and revolutionary praxis as the only possible love story.

We do not mourn the decomposition of the couple-form. We like to think of it as a blessing, a gift from the future. We consider the abolition of the boyfriend and the husband part of the historical movement superseding capitalism and patriarchy. As comrade Dominique Karamazov has written, the constellation of social relations after capitalism will take on a drastically different character: "As communism generalizes free access to goods, and amongst other things

a man with power in a certain milieu. A woman who always needs a man around and will take whatever she can get. A woman who revels in the confidence of being so-and-so's girlfriend. A woman who cheerfully sits on the "girlfriend couch" during band practice. A woman who is depressed during the stretches in between boyfriends.

A woman who views the man she is with as a mirror of her own prowess.

A woman who holds out for a man impressive enough to advance her. A woman whose intellectual labor is monopolized by staying up late writing apologetic emails to her boyfriend rather than drafting her own poems, theory, or architectural plans.

The logic of the couple mediates a woman's relationship to herself and her relationships to other women. In the production of herself as a woman, she remains constantly aware of the need to make herself desirable, to make herself worthy of a man's desire, to be fit for a man's love. The go on, girl! You're worth it! dimension of contemporary female subjectivation has coded women's individual servitude as their self-realization. Post-1950s waves of feminism have reconfigured women's position in capitalism and in relation to men without necessarily

making it any less oppressive. The pseudo-empowerment of
 women to sleep around, wear lipstick, and buy themselves
 chocolate
 if they want to does not amount to any significant change to
 their
 structural exploitation. Do the femme fatale, the burlesque
 dancer,
 the woman executive have a man, or does a man have her?
 A woman
 may completely internalize the demands of the couple, re-
 producing
 herself as attractive, desired, and sought after - traits that
 must be
 produced - even while railing against the sexually predatory
 male.
 The logic of the couple has strengthened the single woman's
 direct
 relationship to the commodity, the imperative to produce
 herself as
 a commodity. Just as in the sphere of circulation — where
 allegedly
 buyers and sellers exchange equivalents — the single woman
 trades
 hours of primping, toning, and plucking for the ability to be
 purchased
 by a man at the meat market. The couple mediates relations
 between women to the extent that they interact not to
 deepen their
 connection to each other, but to gossip about boys, to process
 their
 relationships with men, to trade technologies of femininity
 whereby
 they can improve their status with men. In this way, the
 couple-form
 haunts women when alone or with other women.

wanted everything that you were an entrance into: the smell
 of cigars, the
 doors of the city opening to me, samosas, your aunt's house
 in the countryside,
 the sense that I could walk around with my eyes closed and
 nothing would
 injure me.
 Go out for anti-seductive strolls, a disinterested cruising that
 vibes
 on everything except sex. Or as Guy Hocquenghem writes,
 "if I
 leave my house every night to find another queer by cruising
 the
 places where other queers hang around, I am nothing but a
 proletarian
 of my desire who no longer enjoys the air or the earth and
 whose
 masochism is reduced to an assembly line. In my entire life,
 I have
 only ever really met what I was not trying to seduce."⁴
 Animate other modes of social organization with love and
 eroticism.
 Have a seminar, a reading group, a political party, a street
 gang, a rock
 garden more satisfying than two people in a bed ever could
 be. Love
 in such a way as "to annihilate the outworn, neurotic, and
 egoistic
 categories of subject and object," as Mario Mieli suggests.⁵
 Interrogate and challenge the ways that the logic of the cou-
 ple constructs
 families. Reconsider the bounds of the family and whom one
 visits over holidays. Rethink social bonds outside of the cou-
 ple tie,
 the blood tie, the legal tie.

for their material survival. We are, however, committed to praxis.

These may be some of the forms that the struggle against the couple

will assume, coinciding with a broader movement towards the abolition

of ourselves as women.

Pour menstrual blood on wedding gowns. Send tigers into engagement

parties.

Make love. Anything can be sex. The body is rich and varied in its

parts and sensations. So many ecstasies have yet to be felt.

Get away

from the genital organization of “sexuality.”

Couple-bust, which Solanas describes: “SCUM will couple-bust —

barge into mixed (male-female) couples, wherever they are, and bust

them up.”³

Wrest yourself from the grasp of the couple’s arms (i.e. love jail).

Go out the front door and get caught up in a crowd. Hang out with

3 Solanas, SCUM, 72.

plants and animals. Get into space. Replace the dyad, the pair, the

two halves that make a whole with third, fourth, n not-necessarilyhuman

terms: The three of them and that pack of wolves and that shrub!

The commune! The snow! The tea cups! The knives! The creatures!

Blast open the contents of the lover: I didn’t want to kiss you per se. I

One must not dissociate the desire for a sexual relationship with

a man from patriarchy’s stacked deck. Who are these boyfriends?

What does a woman think having one will get her? In short, everything.

The couple stands in for desire itself, after enshrined, funneled,

and reduced to a single object by patriarchy. Rather than sprouting yearnings for negation or overcoming, young girls plan

their weddings while still in kindergarten. Why does a woman sell

out for some wank? She gives herself over to the couple in the hope

of mitigating her alienation and increasing her sense of “security,” in

the same way that a citizen gives herself over to a repressive state

that she trusts to keep her secure. While perhaps not visible at the

outset, the couple will further alienate and isolate her. She will have

to answer to her husband in addition to her boss, entering into a

relation of hyper-exploitation. Comrade Valerie Solanas heeds the

atomizing function of the couple: “Our society is not a community,

but merely a collection of isolated family units. Desperately insecure,

fearing his woman will leave him if she is exposed to other men

or to anything remotely resembling life, the male seeks to isolate

her from other men and from what little civilization there is,
 so he
 moves her out to the suburbs, a collection of self-absorbed
 couples
 and their kids.”¹ How much can a woman forgive? How
 much does
 she let slide? How long does she tolerate things being amiss,
 rotten,
 fucked up? She avoids breaking up at great costs because
 disobeying
 the logic of the couple will stymie her access to the precise
 mechanisms
 that supposedly save her from this contemptuous existence.
 The semblance of care and a promise of future solidarity con-
 vince
 her to stay in unsatisfying, pathetic circumstances.
 The couple functions as both the problem and its solution. If
 not
 this one, she just needs another boyfriend, one that will treat
 her
 better. A woman may feel the nausea of ambivalence, of be-
 ing caught
 between obsession with phallic power and revulsion from it.
 She
 does not know which is greater, the melancholia of the cou-
 ple or
 the melancholia of denouncing it as a social form. Most opt
 for the
 sadness of the couple over the alienation of being cut loose
 from its
 grasp. Capital lends a shoulder at every turn, suggesting you
 watch a
 rom-com with your girlfriends when heartbroken or provid-
 ing endless

logic of the couple or from one’s own oppression. To liberate
 love
 necessarily involves the abolition of patriarchy and capital-
 ism. One
 cannot opt in or out of these structural relations, and the
 struggle
 against them will be a collective, historical project.
 In this pathetic, stillborn world, we do have feelings. Some-
 times we
 look at someone and think we are in love with them. We
 must crush
 the illusion that romance is or will be an avenue for libera-
 tion. We
 must divest from romantic relationships as means through
 which
 we might access a better world than this one. In realizing
 that their
 economies and conventions are part and parcel of the con-
 tinuing
 soft disaster of our lives, we will leave behind all hitherto
 existing
 couples. New and perhaps unknown forms of feminist orga-
 nizing
 present the only possible frontier for love.
 For those who have accepted the couple-form as a sham, as
 unable
 to allow the circulation of desire, war, and play, we make the
 following
 recommendations. Make no mistake: we are not advocating
 a
 subcultural, individualist, lifestyle, or voluntarist response
 to the
 couple-form, nor do we blame women who must remain in
 couples

nuclei able to protect property relations. Homosexuals perpetuate heterosexual norms and phallocracy through categorizations and role-play, which further codify desires and constitute sex within the logic of phallic centrality and authority. Same sex couples do not escape either the territoriality imposed on desire or the couple's reinforcement and faithfulness to repressive social relations. Dismantling the logic of the couple does not indicate distaste for love, but rather a critique of directing love towards a specific object. One must contextualize the couple-form within patriarchy, as so-called "love" arrives to us through the apparatus of gender. Denouncing the couple does not mean shunning giddiness, love letters written in tiny cursive with quill pens, or the feeling of the sidewalk being a trampoline. Rather, critiquing the couple involves an analysis of the way that patriarchy has recuperated women's desire for solidarity, for intimacy, for excitement, for negation, for the event into a consolidation of phallic power and the accumulation of capital. Who would not arrive at this conclusion: patriarchy and capitalism thwart any possibility to love in a way that liberates oneself from the

ways to personalize your wedding dress. Similar to the framework of electoral politics that limits the scope of critique to the wrong people being in office, the couple-form attributes women's problems to dating the wrong man rather than to the couple itself. As long as she stays invested in the idea of romantic love as salvation, 1 Valerie Solanas, SCUM Manifesto (New York: Verso Books, 2004) 48. 50 CLÉMENCE X. CLEMENTINE AGAINST THE COUPLE-FORM 51 as the guiding principle against isolation and towards fulfillment, she remains tied to the couple-form. As another facet of the couple-as-solution, the discourses surrounding austerity measures and neoliberal restructuring frame the couple as a remedy for poverty. One reads tales of young people shifting between poverty and prison as a result of single parenting, especially absent fathers, as if the restitution of the couple could remedy the poverty and structural racism produced by capitalism. State bureaucrats tell women that the couple and the family that it anchors have replaced social assistance programs: you don't need help with childcare or food stamps; you need a man! The surest way out of poverty is to get married! While many women might never have access

to employment, those who do work for a wage face a gendered

discrepancy in earnings, likely forcing them to rely on male wages to

support their children. These economic mechanisms preserve the

vehemence of the couple-form as a trap for women within capitalism,

which masks unwaged labor as acts of love and care.

The logic of the couple has replaced the logic of god. Turn on the radio

and one can hear innumerable accounts of the absolute position

of the couple: you are the only thing that matters, I cannot go on living

without you — or more evocatively — Every breath you take / And every

move you make / I'll be watching you. Most love songs contain or start

with "I" but the "I" is in fact everyone kneeling beneath the generalized

social form of the couple. The male gaze has replaced the divine

gaze. As Artaud has asked us "To Have Done with the Judgment of

God" (*Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*), let us be done with the

judgment of men.²

Surveying these dynamics, one might wonder if women can opt out

of the couple, perhaps through an exploration of promiscuous affairs.

This option may not go far enough. Do not mistake polyamory for a

post-couple paradigm. Polyamory is a multiplication of the logic of

2 Antonin Artaud, "To Have Done with the Judgment of God (*Pour en finir*

avec le jugement de dieu)" in *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1988).

the couple, not its destruction. Casual sex, primary partners, physical

and emotional availability, and other such distinctions contain

amorous relations within the negotiation of the couple. Polyamory

opens up couple-like formations without the formal commitment

of the couple, expanding its territoriality and octopus-like tentacles

that suck desire into the logic of the couple. Polyamorous or promiscuous

relationships function as strategies for women to navigate patriarchal social relations rather than break with or negate them.

The logic of the couple penetrates queer relationships as well as

straight ones. Homonormativity and gay assimilation have fashioned

queer relationships in the shape of straight coupledness. Rather than

a subversion of heterosexual social relations, assimilationist, liberal

homosexuals have fought for the right to fit into the logic of the

couple — to get married, to wear a wedding dress, to create familial