

Scrapes and scraps are interesting to us: about love in times of survival

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Abstract

This essay proposes to reflect on the experience of love, starting from experiences in dark and hopeless times such as the one that devastated Brazil during the Covid-19 pandemic that started on December 2019. For this, it references authors of archetypal psychology, as well as philosophers and sociologists. It brings examples from clinical practice and literature, and is directed towards an analysis in which love is action and presupposes fragility, belonging, flexibility and otherness. In this sense, being invested in loving relationships, whether in friendship, motherhood, marriage or other manifestations of love, could enable the recognition of the place occupied by the self and the other, which would allow a more harmonious life of the individual with themselves, with the other and with the *anima mundi*. ■



Keywords
love,
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otherness.

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Where did I start from

In 1975, in excavations carried out in the Lapa Vermelha cave, located in the municipality of Pedro Leopoldo – in the Belo Horizonte metropolitan area – the oldest human fossil in Latin America was found, from about 12,500 to 13,000 years ago: Luzia. She was a woman who died between the age of 20 and 24, and this discovery brought controversy to the existing theory about the peopling of America. It meant Luzia had come from Africa, not from Asia, as the first theories claimed. Controversy aside, the fact that matters here is that Luzia's precious skull was taken to the National Museum, located in São Cristóvão – Rio de Janeiro.

On February 9, 2018, the museum's headquarters was devastated by a fire that almost entirely destroyed the institution's historical and scientific collection, comprising about 20 million items. The damage and losses were irreparable. The museum's rescue team spent months identifying and recognizing the remains of history among the ashes. On October 19 of the same year, the museum announced that, amidst the rubble, Luzia resurfaced. 80% of her, because surviving the death drive leaves a mark. But she was reborn. She resisted. She returned from the world of Hades with the marks of negligence and neglect, but she insists on being a record of the past.

In the rubble of the same tragic fire, a rock was found. Those who visited the São Paulo Biennial in 2021 could see it, right at the entrance. An amethyst that, under the heat of the fire, turned into citrine. From violet quartz to yellow quartz. A long alchemy that is only possible in 450°C. The tragedy was inevitably absorbed by the stone, which transformed itself as a way of witnessing the painful process that it went through. But something in it survived, persisted

and resisted. It has changed, but it is the same rock. It remains the same rock because it knew to transform itself. What did the rock imagine while the fire penetrated it? Did it know it was experiencing a process that would not kill it, but change it irrevocably?

On March 17, 2020, after the first recorded death by Covid-19 in Brazil, the government of São Paulo adopted a series of social isolation measures to try to contain the dissemination and spread of the virus. It was the beginning of the pandemic, which would last, so far, an unimaginable 2 years, with a death toll exceeding 620,000. An endless collective nightmare, seasoned with a political scenario of irresponsibility and neglect that left us to fend for ourselves. We still don't know exactly how it's going to mark us, but one thing is certain: all but the alienated will be changed at some level by this devastating experience. What will be left of us after this tragedy?

An unanswered question that raises an infinity of reflections. During this period, I adopted a sort of mantra: "survival gaps". Where did I find them? By noting the resistance of transference love in online sessions, by witnessing loving encounters that took place despite social isolation, by witnessing parental relationships, the birth of new children, friendships that not only survived, but were strengthened. When I'm moved by mothers making plastic covers to be able to hug their children and grandchildren.

There were many love stories that resisted, and insist on resisting. The story of Madalena, for example. Madalena had been my patient in the days when people could be close to each other without a mask. It was a process of approximately two years that ended along with one of her life's cycles. The pandemic brought her back. Like so many stories lived during this period, so-

cial isolation had accelerated in her the intensity of a newly initiated romantic relationship. The plunge of living together precipitated processes that might have taken years to surface. That was the moment of our reunion. A virtual reunion, sustained by the transference and which provided me with one of the most beautiful moments of my experience at the clinic. Madalena got pregnant. I watched her belly grow, always detached from her face: she had to lower her cell phone to show me how much her baby was growing. When I saw her belly, I couldn't see her face. I started noticing the changes in her face, in her countenance, in her gaze. And she told me, including details that would have been unnecessary in face-to-face sessions, about the changes in her body. From the 38th week onwards, whenever the time of her session approached, I'd become anxious to know if she would be on the other side of the camera. And there she was, with her belly that wouldn't stop growing, until the 41st week. In the 42nd week, she was there too! With the baby no longer in her belly, but on her lap. She had just come out of the maternity ward and straight to her session to tell me all the details of her childbirth experience. For the first time, she described the moment of her son's birth. A detailed, emotional, vivid narrative. I felt like I had been present in those hours of childbirth, from her first contractions to the first time she breastfed her son. Love in so many forms: romantic love, maternal love, transference love.

There were many gaps. And we came into contact, intensely and inevitably, with the word "survival". We are survivors. This does not put us in any position of hierarchy or success. We are not survivors because we are heroes or because we have a background in sports. We're survivors because of the deaths of so many others. So many deaths that could have been avoided. Being survivors reminds us of the vulnerability of the life that is lived, it compels us to acknowledge that we have a body that is at risk as we live. Surviving can be lonely. How many people are grieving in our offices, in our families? How many people

who survived mourned, isolated, the deaths of their loved ones? How afraid are we of surviving and transmitting the disease, and death, to the people we love? Nonetheless, according to trans-feminist anthropologist Bru Pereira, "survival is more about life than about death: it is about the life of those who survive as much as it is a testimony about the life that was lost" (2021, p. 69)

The death drive was insistently present throughout this period, not only due to the literal presence of death, illness, fear, but also due to carelessness, neglect, irresponsibility and intolerance. What we Brazilians are experiencing is something much bigger than going through the pandemic, which would have been quite an undertaking by itself. What we Brazilians had to go through was the pandemic in Brazil's current political landscape, which shows disrespect for diversity and individual differences without precedent in Brazilian history, with the exception, perhaps, of the abhorrent years of dictatorship.

Developing a few concepts

In contemporary society, some basic principles of community and collectivity have been damaged, especially by the wave of far-right politics that has invaded the West. With the advent of the pandemic, some of these principles became more evident, perhaps because we lacked a sense of community, perhaps because of our intense need for a government that looked out for its people, something we didn't have.

One of these principles comes from a sense of belonging. Among some other factors, the identity crisis that we are witnessing comes from a lack of external references and a lack of recognition, leaving the subject with an immense range of possibilities from which they are unable to choose. In traditional society, identity and sense of existence were pre-constituted by place of birth, family lineage and social roles assigned to the subject (LIPOVETSKY, 2009). Social transformations allowed reflection and the subject's choice, taking the place of dogmas and hierarchical authority. Choices became part of the

construction of identity, and they are no longer defined simply by origins.

The passage from traditional society – with its rigid rules and concepts – into contemporary society – which praises the self-management and self-construction of the individual – however, demonstrates that society continues to act in a polarized way. The subject who lived in traditional society was tyrannized by the weight of norms and rules, while the contemporary subject is tyrannized by the obligation to be free, refusing any and all external references, seeking in themselves the references for the construction of their identity (LIPOVETSKY, 2009)

During this period, emerges a subject who feels increasingly independent and autonomous, and in order to affirm this achievement, they need to deny any power that requires submission from them. Before, in traditional society, the challenge was confronting the external instances that directed their destiny. The challenge now is to manage internal conflicts between desires and interdictions, norms and transgressions. There is a transference from the external transit to the internal transit, from the objective to the subjective.

The social imperative changes from obeying rules, conventions and social hierarchies to the individual's incessant need to confirm their value, their merits and strength, solely through their own production and actions in the social, economic and personal spheres. The price to be paid for replacing rigid (but stable) external references with a performance that is socially accepted (but unstable and transient) makes individuals more inconsistent.

In this sense, it is necessary to belong in a group in order to constitute one's own identity. According to Francisco Bosco, because we are social beings, "our experience is radically intersubjective. We depend on the recognition of the other to ascend to a feeling of security about our own reality, since reality is itself an intersubjective experience" (2017, p. 9). On the other hand, in excess, this sense of belonging

to a single group can cause pathological feelings of strangeness toward other groups that diverge from their own thinking, which can turn into prejudice, discrimination and violence. Intolerance. And prejudice, as a form of power, "causes many individuals, because they were previously framed in identities devalued by the system of tradition, to not be properly recognized. (ibid., p. 9)

Francisco Bosco brings up the issues of identity struggles in his book *A vítima tem sempre razão?* (Is the victim always right?) Self-recognition is exactly what identity movements can provide to individuals who are part of their groups. Through mutual recognition, individuals feel that they belong to a collective cause, gain strength and come together in the most diverse struggles. Sociologist Eva Illouz (2011) says that love sees and recognizes. To be loved is to be seen and recognized. There is, however, the risk that recognition will only be valid between equals. Everything that is different, foreign to yourself and yours, needs to be eliminated. Identity struggles are extremely important phases of individual and collective psychic development. However, they carry the danger of a lost connection with the multiplicity. Over-identifying with a particular pattern of functioning can bring about a rigidity that leads to a lack of empathy and intolerance. It leads to lovelessness, to hatred, to fundamentalism that, together with the lack of belonging, remove the subject from a place of collectivity, which can lead to many social tragedies.

The danger is that, in this fundamentalist dynamic, the concept of freedom appears distorted to the extent that any intrusion into the contours of the individual sphere is considered harmful. Thus, a negative attribute of freedom can emerge, demanding that not only the state, but also any social interaction remains neutral so as not to bump into the individualized border. In this sense, the other is considered an enemy, and state intervention is considered tyranny, not the common good. Here we see a great deal of

confusion between freedom and unbridled, irresponsible individualism.

In other words, the notions of group, collective, belonging, freedom and community appear through the shadow. And so, love falls into disuse. Love is stripped of all its importance. Its power is diminished by the narcissistic and individualistic capitalist logic and it becomes yet another product in the performance society.

The word love, to bell hooks, “is a noun, but the majority of the most insightful theorists dedicated to the topic recognize that we would all love better if we thought of love as an action” (2020, p.46). It is an action or an imagination because “what we cannot imagine cannot come to be” (ibid., p. 55). Love is realized in the world in an action of giving, not waiting passively to receive, because it is the giving of love that creates love.

Byung-Chul Han (2017), in his book *The Agony of Eros*, states that people today are narcissistically focused on performance and their own success. The other disappears in a dramatic process of narcissification of the self. For the narcissistic subject, there is no difference between the self and the other, but an extension or a projection of the self. The individual is unable to recognize and perceive the other in their otherness. That would mean seeing them in their unique and incomparable difference. This is the *sine qua non* for love. Yet Byung-Chul Han states that:

the primacy of the other distinguishes the power of Eros from the violence of Ares. In the power relation as a relation of domination, I assert and establish myself in front of the other insofar as I submit them to me. But the power of Eros, on the contrary, implies an impotence in which, instead of asserting myself, I lose myself in the other or I lose myself to the other, who then puts me back on my feet (2017, p. 49).

Eros pulls the subject out of itself. In this sense, the utopia of Eros is the recognition of the

other. Coming out of oneself would be to relate to the other, but in their difference and not in their similarity: other beings, other cultures, other stories, other experiences. A relationship with the other that is established beyond performance and power, without attempting to apprehend them and convert them into an equal, because they would cease to be the other. To Alain Badiou

Defending love in its transgressive and heterogeneous nature is really a task of this moment in time. In love, at the very least, one trusts difference rather than distrusting it. And, in reaction, difference is always suspected in the name of identity. If, on the contrary, we want an openness to difference and all that it implies, that is, for the collective to be capable of being the collective of the entire world, one of the practicable points of the individual experience is the defense of love (BADIOU, TRUONG, 2013, p. 60).

Love presupposes death. Death of the self, death of narcissistic ideals, death of power, death of preconceived ideas, death of anthropocentrism. What other deaths does Eros need to have space and establish himself? What are the ego projections that need to be removed for the awakening of Eros?

In current times, we perceive a need to maintain emotional distance. Romantic choices tend to no longer be made intuitively, but rationally. Dating apps try to calculate – preferably without a margin of error – the perfect match for your profile. They leave little room for choosing the improbable and the unexpected. Love appears here as a kind of consumer object available on shelves, and those affected are labeled “emotional”, as if it were negative criticism or a negative quality. However, what would explain so many mismatches that occur in the romantic choices made in this way?

According to Liv Strömquist (2021) in *A Rosa Mais Vermelha Desabrocha (The Reddest*

Rose), emotional distancing comes as much in the service of protecting masculinity at risk as in the service of a reaction from women to years of patriarchy which, in its darkest form, subjugates and belittles people who value emotions and feelings.

It should be reminded that the social distancing required in the pandemic did not contribute in any way to a reduction in emotional distancing. It's quite the opposite: the effects of this distancing brought on by the pandemic cannot yet be measured.

But it's not just – and it would be no small feat – a matter of talking about this emotional distancing in romantic, friend or family relationships. It is an Eros agonizing in the *anima mundi*: in nature, in cities, in politics, in the economy. An agony at the loss of everything in the world that is capable of animating existence. Has love really become irrelevant and insignificant? Has the language of love been forgotten? Is it possible to imagine a language capable of being spoken and understood in diversity? A language of natives and foreigners, that respects differences and that leads people to loving actions? Or are we trapped in the curse of the Tower of Babel, where everyone speaks, each in their own language, and no one is heard, much less understood? Was the death of love part of this curse?

From the myth of the Tower of Babel in chapter 11 of the Book of Genesis:

Before Babel all men on Earth had a single language, they used the same words. They said one to another: "Let us build for ourselves a city and a tower that touches the sky, and let us give ourselves a name so that we do not scatter over all the earth." But the Lord came down from heaven and said: "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of their works. Now, nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them, which means they will be able to do anything. Let us go down

to confuse their language so that they no longer understand each other (BÍBLIA SA-GRADA, 1957, p. 57).

So it happens that God scattered men throughout Earth, and created an infinity of languages, and the people were no longer one. That was the punishment. Mankind was punished for exceeding the limits imposed by God. They wanted to reach the sky or, in other interpretations, attack the sky. For that, they were punished and destined never to understand each other again. However, and here we might find the gap for the encounter with Eros, Hillman (2016) opens up a new possibility for us to interpret the myth. The dispersion of mankind all over the planet and the great variety of geographic locations, which are linked to the multiplicity of languages, constitute a response to the *hybris* of unification. Is the diversity of languages in fact punishment? Could it not be seen as a challenge? The question would be: how could human beings communicate, despite speaking different languages?

Perhaps the answer lies in imagining the use of a way of thinking and a language that are less fundamentalist, fixed, rigid, and more flexible, malleable, fluid. To do so, we will turn to Paul Preciado, a philosopher who speaks from the crossroads because the crossroads, from his point of view, is the only existing place. A thought that speaks neither of the right nor of the left. To think from the crossroads would be not to settle anywhere. It would be to think of the wandering, a thought of the crossing. And he asks which voice could be heard in this non-place, since "to speak is to invent the language of the crossing, to project the voice on an interstellar journey" (PRECIADO, 2020, p. 25). We are no longer interested in "translating our difference into the language of the norm, while continuing to secretly practice an unusual 'blah blah blah' which the law does not understand" (p. 25).

Staying on the margins does not promote fruitful dialogue. Staying on the margins is what promotes wars, intolerance, single thinking,

loneliness, lovelessness. It is necessary to walk. Leaving the margins, towards other paths: peripheral paths, alternative paths, shortcuts; dirt, asphalt and stone paths, with or without weeds, multiple paths.

It is necessary to find ways to return to the sense of community, the one that, according to the myth of the Tower of Babel, would make all the works possible. No longer with a single language, but with the language of plurality, preserving differences, singularities, peculiarities, and thus, with the vulnerabilities arising from this model, we'll know ourselves stronger, precisely because we are weak.

To complete this thought, once again, Francisco Bosco:

Contrary to what one might think at first, a strong ego is not a solid ego. On the contrary, subjects who have a more secure relationship with their self-image are those who have a light, airy, inconsistent, fragile self-image, in a sense. Remember that stereotype comes from the Greek *stereos*, which means solid. A solid ego is fragile because it depends all the time on the confirmation of its self-image. A fragile ego is, on the contrary, strong, because it is not easily shaken by the distorted reflexes presented by the other (2015).

It is not shaken because it relates, it sees and is seen. It recognizes and is recognized. A strong ego could then be conceived as the ego that has a certain level of adaptation and control of reality through reason and will. The adaptation of the imaginal ego (HILLMAN, 1984) however, means being able to imagine reality. The imaginal ego is impelled to be true to itself, as fantasies are the result of the unconscious psychic life and accompany the individual on their trajectory.

I believe this concept could help us find a form of relationship, even within the Tower of Babel. It has a plasticity that makes it more flexible

than strong and heroic, and it can, through imagination and fantasy, lead us to find outlets that respond to the demands of a soul, which is not individual, but inserted in a whole much larger than ourselves.

Paul Preciado radicalizes this. To quote his words, which bring us closer to our weaknesses and even to our cowardice as a way of talking about love:

But since I love you, my courageous equals, I hope you will lack courage in turn. I hope you will no longer have the strength to reiterate the norm, no longer have the energy to fabricate identity, to lose faith in what your documents say about you. And when you have lost all your courage, mad with cowardice, I hope you invent new and fragile uses for your vulnerable bodies. It is because I love you that I desire you weak and without courage. Because it is through fragility that the revolution operates (PRECIADO, 2020, p.142).

From this fragility, we return to that rock. That quartz that was turned from amethyst to citrine by the high temperatures of the fire. The rock that does not die, but transforms itself, that continues to live with its primordial and immutable substance, but transforms its relationship with its own nature. Hillman rightly associates our frailties, our eccentricities, our vulnerabilities with rocks in the psyche. That which is immutable in us. "Some things never change. They are like rocks in the psyche. There are crystals, iron ores, there is a metallic level where certain things do not change" (HILLMAN, VENTURA, 1995, p. 19). Recognizing the immutability of some of our characteristics propels us towards self-acceptance and to the possibility of discovering a new path. This is individuating. Establishing a new relationship with our failures, fragilities and eccentricities.

Love is also rock. Love is rock because it can only exist in fragility. Byung-Chul Han says that

“A singular process of weakening lays hold of the subject of love – which, however, is accompanied by a feeling of strength. This feeling is not the achievement of the self, but the gift of the other” (HAN, 2017, p. 11). The gift of the other that leads us to impotence – the impotence, once again, that leads the individual to lose themselves in the other and for the other, and which is only revealed in weakness.

A good example found in literature is in the book *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez. Florentino Ariza was a young man who easily fell in love with the stuff of life. To him, the world was full of novelty, and he didn't shy away from taking risks and experiencing the adventures that crossed his path. This, however, only happened after he had been turned down by his first love. For Florentino Ariza, the discovery of love came early and with the pain that usually accompanies a great love. Because he experienced love so intensely, Florentino was able to feel its symptoms on his body:

he lost his speech and his appetite, and spent sleepless nights tossing and turning in bed. [...] His anxiety was complicated by diarrhea and green vomit, he became disoriented and started suffering from sudden fainting spells, and his mother was terrified because his condition did not resemble the turmoil of love, but the ravages of cholera (MARQUES, 1985, p. 81 and 82).

But after a thorough examination, the doctor proved that the symptoms of love are the same as those of cholera. That is, love weakens body and soul. Florentino loved many times and in many different ways. However, the rock of your first love returns in old age because love is a daimon. Daimon, according to Hillman (2001) is a sort of guide each soul receives at birth, as if it were the bearer of our destinies, which never leaves and never lets us forget what the soul desires.

Love is a daimon because it is the part of our life that does not belong to us. It is the part that breaks away from the ego's pretensions to be self-sufficient. But it is inevitable to abandon oneself to it, for its demand is our own, and its happiness is our own (AGAMBEM, 2017). Florentino abandons himself, waits and returns. Transformed, of course. Just like that amethyst that turned into citrine, Florentino Ariza's love was no longer a teenage love. Florentino was tried for wanting to realize his love in old age. But the psyche wants it, desires it and needs it. Hillman (2016) states that the soul wants more than it needs, and wanting belongs to the world of love, which is at the basis of loving. Love is beyond need, beyond will. It is love that has us, and all that remains for us is turning it into action.

In this sense, Jung (2012) states that the goal of Eros is to establish, unite and conserve relationships. Its nature is both spiritual and animal, so Eros is present in all types of relationships and includes the full spectrum of emotional affection: from sexuality and friendship to involvement in profession, hobbies and art.

Eros commands, initiates, excites, creates life. Eros has mythical connections with many of the gods of the Olympic pantheon, including Pan, the male force of nature, Dionysus, the indescribable living energy and son of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty. Love in its male and female form. Eros encompasses body, soul and spirit. It is he who penetrates and colors patterns of certain behaviors, prompting transformative events. He is the intermediary between the personal and something beyond the personal. It is he who links, holds together and unites opposites.

Final words

Lastly, I would like to present a poem by American poet Hilda Doolittle. At the age of 74, hospitalized in a sanatorium, Hilda falls in love with a journalist who visits her for an interview, and in order to describe her love, she writes the following poem:

Why did you come
to trouble my decline?
I am old (I was old till you came);
the reddest rose unfolds,
(which is ridiculous
in this time, this place,
unseemly, impossible,
even slightly scandalous),
the reddest rose unfolds;
(nobody can stop that,
no immanent threat from the air,
not even the weather,
blighting our summer fruit),
the reddest rose unfolds,
(they've got to take that into account)
(STRÖMQUIST, 2021, p. 66 and 67 apud
DOOLITTLE, 1972, p. 1).

And so I reach the end of these reflections.
Without any conclusion, because love is its
own conclusion. "Friendship is a conclusion.
Love is an absolute conclusion. It is absolute
because it presupposes death, the surrender
of oneself [...] and as an absolute conclusion,
it goes through death. We die in the other, but
from that death comes a return to oneself"
(HAN, 2017, p.47)

It is through this death of the self via the re-
lationship with the other and the experience of
otherness that individuation takes place. Indi-
viduation is the gathering of one's singularities
and eccentricities, yet never alien to the world,
but inserted in it. It is a life experience with the
collective, with community, with the world and
with other forms of life.

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Resumo

Rasps e restos nos interessam: sobre o amor em tempos de sobrevivência

Este ensaio propõe-se a refletir sobre a experiência do amor, partindo de vivências em tempos sombrios e desesperançosos como o que assolou o Brasil no período de pandemia da Covid-19, ocorrido a partir de dezembro de 2019. Para tanto, utiliza-se de autores da psicologia arquetípica, bem como de filósofos e sociólogos. Traz exemplos da clínica e da literatura e direciona-se para uma análise na qual o amor é ação

e pressupõe fragilidade, pertencimento, flexibilidade e alteridade. Nesse sentido, a entrega aos relacionamentos amorosos, seja na amizade, na maternidade, no casamento ou em outras manifestações amorosas, poderia viabilizar o reconhecimento do lugar ocupado pelo eu e pelo outro, o que possibilitaria uma vida mais harmônica do indivíduo consigo mesmo, com o outro e com a anima mundi. ■

Palavras-chave: amor, pandemia, pertencimento, narcisismo, alteridade

Resumen

Raspaduras y restos nos interesan: sobre el amor en tiempos de supervivencia

Este ensayo propone reflexionar sobre la experiencia del amor, a partir de vivencias en tiempos oscuros y sin esperanza como el que asoló Brasil en el período de la pandemia de Covid 19, ocurrida a partir de diciembre de 2019. Para eso, utiliza autores de la psicología arquetípica, así como filósofos y sociólogos. Trae ejemplos de la clínica y la literatura, y se dirige a un análisis en el que el amor es acción

y presupone fragilidad, pertenencia, flexibilidad y alteridad. En este sentido, la entrega a las relaciones amorosas, ya sea en la amistad, la maternidad, el matrimonio u otras manifestaciones amorosas, podría posibilitar el reconocimiento del lugar que ocupan el yo y el otro, lo que permitiría una vida más armoniosa del individuo consigo mismo, con el otro y con el anima mundi. ■

Palabras clave: amor, pandemia, pertenencia, narcisismo, alteridad

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