

# LE COUP DE FOUDRE:

## Abstract

The current paradigm of the Anglophone philosophical study of love is restricted by problems resulting from love's historical conflation with morality. Consequently, Anglophone philosophies of love are unable to explain basic features such as why we prefer to remain with one partner rather than abandon them when we meet an 'objectively better' potential-partner. This thesis argues that a different approach is warranted which severs love's historical association with morality in favour of a semio-ontological approach and, as such, demonstrates that these key aporias can be overcome when love is understood as a simultaneously impossible and necessary human project and capacity.

## A THESIS ON THE EVENTUALITY OF LOVE AND SUBJECTIVITY

## The Problem

Whilst the philosophical study of love is divided into a discordant variety of outlooks on how to define and study love, union theorists, robust concern theorists, value theorists and emotion theorists share characteristics particular to the current paradigm of the analytic philosophical study of love: all attempt to construct a framework which adheres to ordinary language and can dismiss the ostensibly paradoxical features of love. This goal has reached aporias in a number of different forms: union theorists – such as Fischer (1990) and Scruton (1986) – struggle to explain how one can have union without jeopardising autonomy; whereas robust concern theorists – such as Frankfurt (1999) – want love to be an end in-itself but cannot explain the initial desire for love without introducing a perpetual lack which would undermine the value of love. Furthermore, this paradigm produces other peculiarities, such as Velleman (1999, 2008) and Badhwar's (2003) conviction that lovers need not desire or demonstrate concern for the welfare of their love-objects.

## The Solution

### Sartre and the Impossibility of Love

- Sartre describes the capacity for love as both an essential human need, and free and existent project
- In particular the meaning and value of love was shown to be structurally, or semiologically, derived
- Thus Sartre's description of love pre-empted tenets of structuralism which required greater attention to be paid to contingency
- This description challenged Sartre's ontology and, more importantly the phenomenological method which asserted the conscious beings are radically free
- Sartre, therefore provided the conditions for the reconsideration of subjectivity

### Lacan and the Impossibility of the Subject

- Lacan applied Sartre's formula of contradiction to subjectivity and showed that the world which comprises our conscious experience of structures
- Lacan showed that Freud's identification of the unconscious actually described the repression of a traumatic unstructured world which he called 'the real.'
- In turn, Lacan justified Sartre's observations through conceptualising love as a structural illusion which conceals the impossibility of subjective union through sex
- Problematically, Lacan's psychoanalytic model was unable to encompass/explain agency and the structure's production of the new *i.e.* novelty. A number of Lacan's followers tried to explain how Lacan's model could do so – and with varying degrees of success. The most important of Lacan's followers is Badiou.

### Badiou Reconsidered

- Whilst Badiou's philosophy has made significant developments in accounting for novelty his account only showed how the agency of the structure produced novelty
- Through demonstrating that the axioms of set theory describe multiple types of event I have been able to explain how novelty can occur within the Lacanian structure. More importantly, I have shown Lacan and Badiou's descriptions are two interdependent sides of the same coin: Badiou's describing the subject of the structure and Lacan's describing the subject of the individual.
- The effect of this is to render love as an impossible project which aims a dissolving one's identity through a semiological identification with the real.
- More importantly, that which we have been identifying as love has only been the manifestation of love and the reality is an unseen process as described by set theory

### Badiou and Subtractive Ontology

- Badiou argued that the aporias identified by Lacan and Sartre were typical of a structural system. In other words, Badiou argued that philosophy is ideological and cannot eliminate aporias from its theoretical framework
- However, Badiou asserted that ontology, the object of Sartre and Lacan's exposition, could be accurately and coherently described by – set theoretical – mathematics
- Thus Badiou showed how Lacan axiomatic set theory accurately describes the ideological construction of the subject in the form of the formal construction of distinct and units from the inconsistent multiples upon which all numbers are based
- Furthermore, Badiou demonstrated that Cohen's concept of forcing could explain how novelty can be brought into a Lacanianesque structure without relying on the antiquated phenomenological method of establishing first principles from experience

## The Metaphor

Thus love can be described in terms of the metaphor of lightning. More precisely, the French phrase *un coup de foudre* – which means a bolt from the blue - is used idiomatically to describe love at first sight. Whilst this metaphor is fitting for the sudden and unpredictable occurrence of love, it does not account for the unseen processes which dictate who falls in love with whom and which largely escape our notice unless we take account of sprites. Sprites are a special type of lightning which accompany very intense electrical storms and occur high above them in the stratosphere (the background of this poster is an accurately scaled illustration of this phenomenon). In essence, where Anglophone philosophies of love have failed is in identifying generic lightning as their subject. My reformulation of Badiou and Lacan allows us to see that the important aporias are necessary within a philosophy of love because we are limited by our structure perspective. Thus the object of love is beyond our sight and occurs beyond the means of the consistent framework of language.

OLIVER GEORGE DOWNING