“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 oper-
ate 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 relations 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. Patriarchy has systematically excluded women from *the action* and *the discourse*, consigning them as a class to perform the unwaged work of social reproduction. Rather than an essentialist concept, the category of woman stems from a gendered mode of exploitation and relegates 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

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.
Interrogate and challenge the ways that the logic of the couple constructs families. Reconsider the bounds of the family and whom one visits over holidays. Rethink social bonds outside of the couple tie, the blood tie, the legal tie.

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 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 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 coupledom. Feminist struggle remains the ever-enticing horizon before us.

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, reproducing 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.

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
Triarchy 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 logic of the couple or from one’s own oppression. To liberate love necessarily involves the abolition of patriarchy and capitalism. 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. Sometimes 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 liberation. 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 continuing soft disaster of our lives, we will leave behind all hitherto existing couples. New and perhaps unknown forms of feminist organizing 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 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.”

long as she stays invested in the idea of romantic love as salvation, 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 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 couple-dom. 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 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 pa-

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).