

Only Love is Not Enough

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In the absence of sexual relation, people form love affairs. Nevertheless: “The postulate of love coming to the place of sexual non-relation says nothing about the quality of love [...]”¹ Examining the case of Marina Abramović and Ulay, I would suggest that love seemed inadequate to cover for the void of sexual relation, without the mediation of art. They met in 1975, and their sexual chemistry was immediate: same birthday, same thoughts, even conversations in dreams, which continued in waking life.² Their relationship grew more and more symbiotic, not man nor woman anymore, but hermaphrodite.³ They soon decided to make performances together, trying to explore the different possibilities that can occur in relationships. Interestingly, aggressiveness, apparent in almost all their collaborative works, had nothing to do with their everyday life as a couple: “We lend ourselves to demonstrate the inability and dramatic fears of human relation.”⁴ To accomplish this, they used their bodies⁵; bodies hurt, even tortured, throughout the performance, bodies very present but at the same time ignored. They would stop only because of exquisite pain.⁶

Their performances attested to the aggressive, hateful, even fatal results of a relation based on the imaginary and, at the same time, through their artistic approach, they were creating a third part. “Our work was the third”⁷ had said Ulay, echoing Lacan’s thesis on artistic creation: “In offering an imitation of an object, they make something different out of that object. Thus, they only pretend to imitate.”⁸

Lacan contested the agglutinating quality of love⁹, that we could observe in their case. The imaginary union into one would become an obstacle and love would be “condemned to remain

¹ Fajnwaks, F, “Love After Love: A Real Love?” *Psychoanalytical Notebooks of the London Society of the NLS*, 40, 2023, p. 42.

² Abramović, M., *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir* (2nd ed.). Penguin Books: London, 2016, p. 77-78.

³ Cassin, A., “ULAY with Alessandro Cassin”, The Brooklyn Rail, May, 2011. Available at: <https://brooklynrail.org/2011/05/art/ulay-with-alessandro-cassin/>

⁴ The Story of Marina Abramović & Ulay (interview). Available at: <https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/story-marina-abramovic-ulay>

⁵ Abramović, M., *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir* (2nd ed.). Penguin Books: London, 2016, p. 111.

⁶ The Story of Marina Abramović & Ulay (interview). Available at: <https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/story-marina-abramovic-ulay>

⁷ Cassin, A., “ULAY with Alessandro Cassin”, The Brooklyn Rail, May 2011. Available at: <https://brooklynrail.org/2011/05/art/ulay-with-alessandro-cassin/>

⁸ Lacan, J., *The Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 1959-60, edited by J. - A. Miller, trans. D. Porter, Routledge: London, 1992, p. 174.

⁹ Bosquin- Caroz, P., “Painful Loves”, Presentation of the 2025 NLS Congress.

hooked onto the image that is the denial of the two (the image of the two that in love make one)¹⁰, if it wasn't art, which, by offering a symbolic recognition, as well as introducing the dimension of the real, through the real of the body, became the necessary crutch, supporting the amorous relationship.