

I-love-you, amen

George Bartlett

Barthes writes the declaration of love as a holophrase.¹ *I-love-you*, “like a child’s word,” is a “proffering” that arrives as a “single flash” where the “subject and the object come to [the] word even as it is uttered.”² It “stands at the limit of syntax” like an *amen*, which is itself spoken at the edges of language “without collusion with its system.”³

In this way, we can imagine that the declaration aspires to the littoral, where, as a letter, it could inscribe the event of love and its corporal affects. ‘Corporal’ because love, as emerging from the gap in the Other — the proper name for which Lacan says is *encore*⁴ — reverberates through the body of the *parlêtre* like the notes of a glass harp. Love, after all, often hystericizes.

Yet the declaration fails in its aspirations, for the moment it enters discourse through speech, the demand of love appears as a question posed to the Other. *I-love-you* becomes *Do you love me?*, in which we can hear how *love demands love*. “It demands it... *encore*.”⁵ Lacan, let us remember, designates love as a *passion* and, noting its Latin root of *patior*, we can say that to love is to suffer; love is a “border phenomenon”⁶ that is endured *en-corps*. The declaration, when spoken, comes to limit this suffering.

Once the first avowal—the love cry—has been made, Barthes writes, “*I-love-you* has no meaning [whatsoever]; it merely repeats in an enigmatic mode.”⁷ However, taking the distinction between *being* and *existence* as our orientation, the contrary seems to be the case: The declaration of love *summons* meaning, which, returned by the Other as S_2 , mortifies the *jouissance* of the love event.

Further, Philippe La Sagna highlights Badiou’s idea that “the event of love will lead to the declaration and continues in ‘fidelity’ to the event”⁸ as “hardly detached” from the dead love of the psychotic. The declaration, then, petrifies love each time it is spoken. Love, as a *passion*

¹ Lacan in Seminar I speaks of the holophrase, stating that “what is involved is something in which what pertains to the register of the symbolic composition is defined at the limit, at the periphery,” adding that “every holophrase is connected with limit situations, in which the subject is suspended in a specular relation to the other.” (Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester, New York: Norton, 1991, p. 227.).

² Barthes, R., *A Lover’s Discourse*, trans. R. Howard, London: Vintage, 2018, pp. 147-154.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Norton, 1999, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Vinciguerra, R.-P., “The Paradoxes of Love”, *La Cause Freudienne* No. 40, 1999. Available online at https://londonociety-nls.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/vinciguerra-rose-paule_the-paradoxes-of-love.pdf

⁷ Barthes, R., *A Lover’s Discourse*, trans. R. Howard, London: Vintage, 2018, p. 147.

⁸ La Sagna, P., “Love Event”, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks of the London Society of the New Lacanian School* 60, p. 64.

of being, makes it a refusal of the contingent encounter; an *I don't want to know anything about it*—the slogan of love's brother, Ignorance, in the fraternity of passions.

Finally, love on the side of being aims to make *one* of two as a solution to the sexual non-relation. This is a false *one*, says Miller, a *one* as signified *qua* meaning. This is courtly love. Love on the side of *existence*, meanwhile, is made possible in analysis via the disjunction that appears in the transference, and which is maintained by the analyst's desire. This love attempts not to make *one* of two, but instead appeals to the One, “which is an effect of writing, not of signification.”⁹

Thus, while love may come into *being* with the declaration, it is only by “incarnating the gap”¹⁰ in the Other that the analyst may support the *ex-istence* of love *en-corps*.

⁹ Miller, J.-A., “The One is Letter”, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks of the London Society of the New Lacanian School* 37/38, p. 40.

¹⁰ Mildiner, K. “Incarnating the Gap.” *Lacanian Review Online*, 23 November 2019, available online: <https://www.thelacanianreviews.com/incarnating-the-gap/>