

“*Don’t threaten me*” is the conclusion of what begins with “*love*”, in Jimmie Durham’s poem.

Whether it is a case of love-turned-threat, love-as-threat, threat-as-love, or simply love’s appeal (either a plea or an allure), love’s condition, or love’s very own threat – the two are inseparable. Between the beginning and its corresponding end are written sharp words of affection. A sharpness that is, of course, about wit and the use of linguistic tools to deliver it, and also, of actual affection.

Affection always comes with an edge, against the notions of comfort, identification, tenderness, and construction. In essence: the risk of trust, the effort of action, the perseverance that defies incoherences, the uncertainty of fulfillment.

Affection consists less of compliance than it does of resistance. The liminality of that sharp edge where its integral components are defiantly and continuously tilting into their seeming contrast works as a motor, a sensuous perpetuum mobile, and the motion principle of perhaps any process of change, transition, or transformation. It is an instance of a time-defying, entirely self-governing and self-sufficient mechanism – an impossible machine.

In dealing with impossibilities, as much as with any occurrence of change that is or seems (often deceptively so) beyond our grasp, it is where the inventions and the narratives of technology begin. At one point, it was the mastering of fire, the enigmatic craft of metallurgy, and the tales of *Excaliburs*; today, it is clairvoyant devices, technological telepathy, and reconfigured distances.

Extensions serve to reach the previously thought unattainable, unknown, herculean, and superhuman, which only adds to the resilience of their spell. The desire for such enchantment may be ingrained in any technological – or amorous – quest. However, there is no magic here, neither in swords nor in affects. Rather than being inexplicable, their underpinnings are certainly palpable and concrete: a body is a prerequisite for the existence of any sentiment or artifact. This condition makes materiality and fleshiness hard to evade: there will be “no humanity without technique, no technique without memory, no memory without language, no tool without gesture, no gesture without a relationship of the body to matter.” (George Didi-Huberman, in *L’Empreinte*, 2008)

A body implies eventual use, and therefore, wear and strain. It needs nurture. And it requires other bodies.

Physical labor was at the basis of Sara Bichão's action piece "O", which also relied on shared effort. The performance is characterized as an intercorporeal act that reminds one of the unavoidable necessity of the collective or negotiated aspect of achieving a goal. "O" took place on the river Tagus in 2021 and was in every sense a materialization of endurance, one that had to assume, or better, allow for the unpredictable, untamed, and open-ended quality of any voyage. However, this particular passage was not to merely reach the end of the line, to follow a linear path from the point of departure to the point of arrival, but to carry and let appear out of a melting block of ice an instrument – in fact, a very specialized kind of tool: a weapon. An item with inherent risk, imbued with promise and potentiality.

But potency is not only in the capacity for charged agency and penetration. A steady, still and slow resistance of the real might have a less immediate, but persisting, tangible effect. In Manon Harrois' "*Le réel tient bon*", a temporary pillar is constructed of the same components that are needed to sustain a body (a biological as much as a social one), a dwelling, or a shelter, while they can also serve the deconstructive actions of upheaval. The means of construction and fundamental nurture are the same as those of disruption and revolt; the site of gathering and sharing is the same as that of departure and rupture. However, the gradual breaking down of erect verticality does not mean demolition; it only implies a change in the orientation of the line, a new course, the possibility of horizontal movement, or maybe an entirely different plane.

The threat of change, even that ambiguously stated threat of love, often plays out in the space between the bodies. This relational, vulnerability-infused zone is occupied and activated by Valentina Desideri's proposal for a meditative, interpersonal exchange which calls for a sustained focus, and the shifting of attention and cares from one's own body to the body of others. A deck of cards, to be played between two, "*The Fake Therapy*" does imitate a curative model, materialized in the format of a game – all in all, a pretend act – which still makes it no less soothing. Nor less challenging.

Language is another way to navigate the hazards of hazy interpersonal space. While plastic and dubious (enough to morph love into threat), or mostly just rough and unyielding, language's expected function to provide a solid common ground can regularly give in. But to bypass the weight of misinterpretations and not knowing what is truly meant (*what do we talk about when*

*we talk about affection?*) – some things are simply what they are or what they say, such as in Lawrence Weiner's work – "*The Pursuit of Happiness*" is just that.

The game of meanings that begins after the obvious is seen and read is perhaps not very different from the definition of a game by Bernard Suits in his 1978 book *Grasshopper*, which he outlines as a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. The obstacle here is the limit of the familiar, the secure, and the known. The readiness to cross the line becomes inevitable and quite vital for such generative liminality – either in the construction of new meanings or in love.

LOVE

If I had understood I would not have stood under that

wood knot.

Move above the cove to see the sea plain below the plains.

D'ya know what I mean?

Time flies like an arrow,

Butterflies like a flower.

Words cannot express what I feel for you

And I have red that actions speak louder than words

And birds of a feather flock together through all kinds  
of weather,

But what I do I would not, and what I would I do not.

I need you to love me. I love you. You could say,

'Don't threaten me.'

(Jimmie Durham)

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2018 Berlin