

I Love You

je-t'-aime / I-love-you

The figure refers not to the declaration of love, to the avowal, but to the repeated utterance of the love cry.

1. Once the first avowal has been made, "*I love you*" has no meaning whatever; it merely repeats in an enigmatic mode—so blank does it appear—the old message (which may not have been transmitted in these words). I repeat it exclusive of any pertinence; it comes out of the language, it divagates—where?

I could not decompose the expression without laughing. Then there would be "me" on one side, "you" on the other, and in between a joint of *reasonable* (i.e., lexical) affection. Anyone can feel how much such a decomposition, though conforming to linguistic theory, would disfigure what is *flung out* in a single impulse. *To love* does not exist in the infinitive (except by a metalinguistic artifice): the subject and the object come to the word even as it is uttered, and *I-love-you* must be understood (and read here) in the Hungarian fashion, for instance, for Hungarian uses a single word, *szeretlek*, as if French, renouncing its splendid analytical quality, were an agglutinative language (and it is, indeed, agglutination which is in question here). This clump is shattered by the slightest syntactical alteration; it is, so to speak, beyond syntax and yields itself to no structural transformation; it has no equivalent among its substitutes, whose combination might nonetheless produce the same meaning; I can say *I-*

R.H.

R.H.: Conversation.

Nietzsche

love-you for days on end without perhaps ever being able to proceed to “*I love her*”: I resist making the other pass through a syntax, a predication, a language (the sole Assumption of *I-love-you* is to apostrophize it, to give it the expansion of a first name: *Ariadne, I love you*, Dionysus says).

2. *I-love-you* has no usages. Like a child’s word, it enters into no social constraint; it can be a sublime, solemn, trivial word, it can be an erotic, pornographic word. It is a socially irresponsible word.

I-love-you is without nuance. It suppresses explanations, adjustments, degrees, scruples. In a way—exorbitant paradox of language—to say *I-love-you* is to proceed as if there were no theater of speech, and this word is always *true* (has no other referent than its utterance: it is a performative).

I-love-you has no “elsewhere”—it is the word of the (maternal, amorous) dyad; in it, no distance, no distortion will split the sign; it is the metaphor of nothing *else*.

Lacan

I-love-you is not a sentence: it does not transmit a meaning, but fastens onto a limit situation: “the one where the subject is suspended in a specular relation to the other.” It is a holophrase.

(Though spoken billions of times, *I-love-you* is extra-lexicographical; it is a figure whose definition cannot transcend the heading.)

3. The word (the word-as-sentence) has a meaning only at the moment I utter it; there is no other information

LACAN: See *Le Séminaire*, I, on the limit situation and the holophrase.

in it but its immediate saying: no reservoir, no armory of meaning. Everything is in the speaking of it: it is a "formula," but this formula corresponds to no ritual; the situations in which I say *I-love-you* cannot be classified: *I-love-you* is irrepressible and unforeseeable. Then to what linguistic order does this odd being, this linguistic feint, belong, too articulated to be no more than an impulse, too phatic to be a sentence? It is neither quite what is uttered (no message is congealed, sorted, mummified within it, ready for dissection) nor quite the uttering itself (the subject does not allow himself to be intimidated by the play of interlocutory sites). We might call it a *proffering*, which has no scientific place: *I-love-you* belongs neither in the realm of linguistics nor in that of semiology. Its occasion (the point of departure for speaking it) would be, rather, Music. In the manner of what happens in singing, in the proffering of *I-love-you*, desire is neither repressed (as in what is uttered) nor recognized (where we did not expect it: as in the uttering itself) but simply: released, as an orgasm. Orgasm is not spoken, but it speaks and it says: *I-love-you*.

4. To *I-love-you* there are various mundane answers: "I don't love you," "I don't believe a word," "Why do you have to say so?," etc. But the true dismissal is: "There is no answer": I am wiped out more completely if I am rejected not only as the one who demands but also as the speaking subject (as such, I have at least the mastery of the formulas); it is my language, the last resort of my existence, which is denied, not my demand; as for the demand, I can wait, make it again, present it later; but denied the power of questioning, I am "dead," forever. "*There is no answer*," the Mother makes Françoise say to

Proust the young Proustian narrator, who then correctly identifies himself with the “mistress” sent away by her lover’s concierge: the Mother is not forbidden, she is foreclosed and I go mad.

5. *I love you. —So do I.*

Rousseau *So do I* is not a perfect answer, for what is perfect can only be formal, and the form here is deficient, in that it does not literally take up the proffering—and it is proper to the proffering to be literal. However, insofar as it is assimilated into the subject’s hallucination, this reply is enough to set going a whole discourse of jubilation: jubilation all the more powerful in that it wells up by means of a sudden transformation: Saint-Preux discovers abruptly, after several haughty denials, that Julie loves him. This is the delirious truth which does not come by reasoning, by any slow preparation, but by surprise, awakening (*satori*), conversion. The Proustian child—asking that his mother sleep in his room—wants to obtain the *So-do-I*: wants to *deliriously*, in the fashion of a madman; and he, too, obtains it by a reversal, by the Father’s capricious decision, conceding him the Mother (“Tell Françoise to make up your bed in his room, then, and sleep there tonight”).

Proust

6. I hallucinate what is *empirically* impossible: that our two profferings be made *at the same time*: that one does not follow the other, as if it depended on it. Proffering cannot be double (doubled): only the *single flash* will do, in which two forces join (separate, divided, they would not exceed some ordinary agreement). For the

Baudelaire
Klossowski

single flash achieves this unheard-of thing: the abolition of all responsibility. Exchange, gift, and theft (the only known forms of economy) each in its way implies heterogeneous objects and a dislocated time: my desire against something else—and this always requires the time for drawing up the agreement. Simultaneous proffering establishes a movement whose model is socially unknown, unthinkable: neither exchange, nor gift, nor theft, our proffering, welling up in crossed fires, designates an expenditure which relapses nowhere and whose very community abolishes any thought of reservation: we enter each by means of the other into absolute materialism.

7. *So-do-I* inaugurates a mutation: the old rules fall away, everything is possible—even, then, this: that I give up possessing you.

A revolution, in short—not so far, perhaps, from the political kind: for, in both cases, what I hallucinate is the absolute New: (amorous) reform has no appeal for me. And, to cap the paradox, this pure New is ultimately the most worn-down of stereotypes (just last night, I heard it uttered in a play by Sagan: every other night, on TV, someone says: *I love you*).

8. —And what if I didn't interpret *I-love-you*? What if I maintained the proffering on this side of the symptom? —You take your chances: haven't you said hundreds of times how intolerable the lover's suffering is, and his necessity to get out of it? If you want to "recover," you have to believe in the symptoms, and believe that *I-love-you* is one of them; you have to interpret, i.e., ultimately you have to *disparage*.

BAUDELAIRE: "*La Mort des amants*."

Nietzsche

—Then what do we have to think of suffering? How do we have to conceive it? evaluate it? Is suffering necessarily on the side of evil? Doesn't suffering in love have to do only with a reactive, disparaging treatment (one must submit to the prohibition)? Can one, reversing the evaluation, imagine a tragic view of love's suffering, a tragic affirmation of *I-love-you*? And if (amorous) love were put (put back) under the sign of the Active?

9. Whence a new view of *I-love-you*. Not as a symptom but as an action. I speak so that you may answer, and the scrupulous form (the letter) of the answer will assume an effective value, in the manner of a formula. Hence it is not enough that the other should answer me with a mere signified, however positive ("*So do I*"): the addressed subject must take the responsibility of formulating, of proffering the *I-love-you* which I extend: *I love you*, Pelléas says. —*I love you, too*, Mélisande says.

Pelléas's imperious suit (supposing that Mélisande's answer was *exactly* the one he expected, which is probable since he dies immediately afterwards) proceeds from the necessity, for the amorous subject, not only to be loved in return, to know it, to be sure of it, etc. (all operations which do not exceed the level of the signified), but to *hear it said* in the form which is as affirmative, as complete, as articulated as his own; what I want is to receive full in the face, entirely, literally, without evasion or leakage, the formula, the archetype of love's word: no syntactical subterfuge, no variation: that the two phrases, the two words, should correspond totally, coinciding signifier by signifier (*So do I* would be just the contrary of a holophrase); what matters is the physical, bodily, labial proffering of the word: open your lips and let it out (be obscene).

Ravel What I want, deliriously, is to *obtain the word*. Magical, mythical? The Beast—held enchanted in his ugliness—loves Beauty; Beauty, obviously, does not love the Beast, but at the end, vanquished (unimportant by what; let us say by the *conversations* she has with the Beast), she, too, says the magic word: “*Je vous aime, la Bête*”; and immediately, through the sumptuous arpeggio of a harp, a new subject appears. Is this story an archaic one? Then here is another: a man suffers because his wife has left him; he wants her to come back, he wants—specifically—her to say *I love you* to him, and he, too, runs after the words; finally she says it to him: whereupon he faints dead away: a film made in 1975. And then, once again, the myth: the Flying Dutchman wanders the earth in search of the word; if he obtains it (by an oath of fidelity), he will cease wandering (what matters to the myth is not the rule of fidelity but its proffering, its song).

10. Singular encounter (within the German language): one and the same word (*Bejahung*) for two affirmations: one, seized upon by psychoanalysis, is doomed to disparagement (the child’s first affirmation must be denied so that there may be access to the unconscious); the other, posited by Nietzsche, is a mode of the will-to-power (nothing psychological, and even less of the social in it), the production of difference, the *yes* of this affirmation becomes innocent (it contains the reaction-formation): this is the *amen*.

I-love-you is active. It affirms itself as force—against other forces. Which ones? The thousand forces of the world, which are, all of them, disparaging forces (science, *doxa*, reality, reason, etc.). Or again: against language. Just as the *amen* is at the limit of language, without collu-

RAVEL: “*Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête*,” from *Ma Mère l’Oye*.

sion with its system, stripping it of its “reactive mantle,” so the proffering of love (*I-love-you*) stands at the limit of syntax, welcomes tautology (*I-love-you* means *I-love-you*), rejects the servility of the Sentence (it is merely a holophrase). As proffering, *I-love-you* is not a sign, but plays against the signs. The one who does not say *I-love-you* (between whose lips *I-love-you* is reluctant to pass) is condemned to emit the many uncertain, doubting, greedy signs of love, its indices, its “proofs”: gestures, looks, sighs, allusions, ellipses: he must let himself be *interpreted*; he is dominated by the reactive occasion of love’s signs, exiled into the servile world of language *in that he does not say everything* (the slave is one who has his tongue cut off, who can speak only by looks, expressions, faces).

Nietzsche

The “signs” of love feed an enormous reactive literature: love is *represented*, entrusted to an aesthetic of appearances (it is Apollo, *ultimately*, who writes every love story). As a counter-sign, *I-love-you* is on the side of Dionysus: suffering is not denied (nor even complaint, disgust, resentment), but by its proffering, it is not internalized: to say *I-love-you* (to repeat it) is to expel the reaction-formation, to return it to the deaf and doleful world of signs—of the detours of speech (which, however, I never cease to pass through). As proffering, *I-love-you* is on the side of expenditure. Those who seek the proffering of the word (lyric poets, liars, wanderers) are subjects of Expenditure: they spend the word, as if it were impertinent (base) that it be recovered somewhere; they are at the extreme limit of language, where language itself (and who else would do so in its place?) recognizes that it is without backing or guarantee, working without a net.

NIETZSCHE: This entire fragment, of course, takes its departure from Deleuze’s *Nietzsche et la philosophie*.