

A Certain Logic of Professing Love

Jure Simoniti

It is a commonplace that if we weren't creatures endowed with language, we probably wouldn't be capable of love. But would it be possible to deduce the very element of language which makes us prone to loving in the first place? To answer this question, love, in our view, must no longer be regarded as existing in the usual linguistic medium of "doing things with words," but rather in the medium of doing words with things. By inverting the title of Austin's famous book, we place ourselves in an unmistakable opposition to a certain penchant of twentieth-century philosophy that conceived of language as nothing but a means of using, comprising, dominating, or endlessly mediating reality. Within the more pragmatic scope, the linguistic sign was conceived as referring to something, singling out things, specifying their kind; in the otherwise dissimilar vein of poststructuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism, the sign still remained a contextual tool of marking out a situation. By contrast, the goal of this paper is to identify an entirely different function of language, one neglected and suppressed by the anti-idealism that permeates post-Hegelian philosophy. To be sure, the elements of language might as well have been invented so as to signal parts of reality; however, when language assumes some kind of systematic form and relative completion, it begins enticing entirely new dimensions of its deployment. We will therefore examine a certain phenomenology of language-use which is characterized by the reversal of the direction of reference. At some point, man no longer uses language in order to point to

things and states for the purpose of transferring information; rather, he seems to begin to detect and occupy the very gaps in reality in which an element of language can be declared and pronounced in its ideal purity, beyond any referential, signifying, or pragmatic end. Instead of utilizing words, man starts monumentalizing them. Love offers but one, if, due to its verbal simplicity, particularly heuristic, example of this turn in the functioning of language. In a romantic relationship, for instance, there comes a time when we cease professing love in honor of the beloved, we cease conveying our momentary inclinations, which are usually of the sexual sort, and soliciting affection in return; henceforth, in a diffuse and uneven landscape of daily life, we rather seek sparse moments and places where love itself could still be uttered, without direct reference either to the emotions of the lover, or to the qualities of the beloved. A word, instead of being a tool that refers to reality, itself becomes a referent of reality. And this process, which might be called “idealization of the linguistic sign,” achieves an adequacy that surpasses the usual mode of reference; in a way, the professing of love never misses its object. Therefore, the analyses of the instances and modalities of declaring love will represent only a small contribution to the broader research on one of the most fundamental, if strangely undervalued and ignored, features of language, namely, its necessary and irreducible idealism.

The Spontaneous Metaphysics of Words

There is something about professing love that touches upon the very core of understanding language, a fact programmatically overlooked by recent philosophy. In order to discern this point, a sweeping panorama of the development of the philosophy of language in this short period of time should be sketched out first, with the aim of defining what was successfully brought to light and what was inevitably suppressed.

The best way to approach this is to examine the anti-idealist bias of post-Hegelian thought. Nowadays, it seems self-evident to identify Western philosophy between Kant and postmodernism with anti-realism. However, Marx's critique of ideology and Nietzsche's genealogical method established a tradition of anti-idealism which might have unified the philosophy of the following hundred and fifty years even more thoroughly than its alleged lack of realism. After Hegel, the main task of philosophy seems to have been to invent procedures that would bring down ideas from the heavens of direct intuition, to bring the monologues of reason and the thoughts of God down to the Earth of mediation, labor, the market economy, power, and then, in the twentieth century, to the terrestrial spheres of communication, interpretation, and, ultimately, the normality of everyday life. Even though every one of the great thinkers of the recent century, from Heidegger and Wittgenstein to Derrida and Barthes, raised his own specific theory of language into a particular, exclusive ontology, their endeavors can be brought under the smallest common denominator, which is the suppression of the effects of idealization. And it seems that this suppression is based on one single central operation uniting such diverse systems of thought: it consists in reducing the proposition to the locus of proposition.¹ The examples are more than abundant; let us limit ourselves to a few.

It was Heidegger who disclosed the crux of the matter: "Assertion is not the primary 'locus' of truth. [...] assertion is grounded in Dasein's uncovering, or rather in its disclosedness" (Heidegger 1962, p. 269). Every articulated sentence can only be derived from a more holistic environment of everyday concerns. Similarly, in Wittgenstein, the truth value of each proposition is determined by the pragmatic point of the situation, its *Witz*. In the wake of Wittgenstein, the most influential school of analytical

¹ Here, we are following the translation of Heidegger's "*Ort des Satzes*," but Lacan's "*place d'énonciation*" must also come to mind.

language philosophy—composed of Austin, Ryle, and Strawson in Oxford—bears the title “ordinary language philosophy,” as opposed to the Viennese philosophy of ideal language. And this “ordinariness” seems merely to give a name to the general atmosphere of the century, in which language was regarded as something intrinsically quotidian, normal, average, and public, i.e., something the ideal impulses of which had to be restrained at any cost. In Lacan, to proceed with our examples, truth can only be half-said; “half-saying is the internal law of any kind of enunciation of the truth” (Lacan 2007, p. 126). Transferred to linguistics, the structure of half-saying ensures that truth never lies in a proposition alone, but always comprises its difference from the place from where it is proposed, the *place d’énonciation*. This turn was even more pronouncedly performed by Deleuze and Guattari, who stated in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “*En vérité, ce ne sont pas les énoncés qui renvoient aux propositions, mais l’inverse*” (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, p. 184).² Simultaneous with this reduction of sentences to statements, a certain descent from high to low languages takes place, so that suddenly even the analytic “ordinary language” no longer suffices, and, for Deleuze, the standards of linguistic meaning are being set by the languages of minorities, guerrillas, ghettos, as well as by gestures, exclamations, vocal tones, and local dialects. In the same spirit, Foucault claims in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: “not only can this identity of the statement not be situated once and for all in relation to that of the sentence, but it is itself relative and oscillates according to the use that is made of the statement and the way in which it is handled” (Foucault 1989, p. 117). In short, there is no way that a sentence in its ideal, trans-contextual “truth” could ever over-

² For some mysterious reason, this very “statement” is left out of the English translation. Let us attempt a translation, deploying the opposition sentence/statement: “In truth, it is not statements which are based on sentences but vice versa.”

determine a statement in its local, historical, discursive relativity. It is the same prohibition that sets up the framework of the entire philosophy of Derrida, as for instance in this passage: “The phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction (‘there is nothing outside the text’), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context” (Derrida 1988, p. 136). Every proposition is a priori contextualized, every sentence always already “grounded” in a statement, and a linguistic sign can never fully sustain its ideality by being repeated but is rather affected by each context and its network of differences, which minimally shifts the semantic substance of the sign. Finally, Barthes begins to nurture a veritable anti-sentential resentment, preferring unfinished sentences, lexical, sporadic speech, interjections, and stuttering: “There are languages of the sentence and all the other kinds. The first are marked by a constraining character, an obligatory rubric: the completion of the sentence” (Barthes 1989, p. 96).

Drawing a line at this point, an image of language painted by the twentieth century now arises before our eyes, perhaps not entirely without self-indulgence: it consists either of Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein’s practical commands and instructions ending with exclamation marks (“Hand me the hammer!”), or of Lacan’s word-plays, Derrida’s text-collages, Deleuze’s dialects in the ghettos, and Barthes’s rustle of fragmentary words. The greatest advocate of this principal and epoch-defining pluralization, disintegration, and profanation of language was undoubtedly Wittgenstein, so it is his philosophy that offers the clearest evidence and explanation of the reasons for the suppression of the effects of idealization.³ His entire mature thought is based on the assumption that the world in which we live is alright, and that there is nothing wrong

³ In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein programmatically declares: “What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (Wittgenstein 2009, § 116).

with the language we speak; difficulties only arise when we place one upon the other, assign elements of reality to the elements of language, and try to imagine rigid and sharp meanings of words. The fault of this world is not that we will never find “God,” “beauty,” “good,” or “meaning” in it; the problem is rather that the word—born out of gestures, indexes, signals, symbols, then becoming ever more abstract and general—is sought after in this world as if it was immediately incarnated and is, hence, idealized. After all, man does not suffer because his life has no meaning; he only suffers after he has begun to expect some meaning from it. The reason for the meaninglessness of life does not lie in life but in meaning. As a consequence, Wittgenstein proposes arguably the greatest anti-idealist programme in the history of thought. Henceforth, philosophy is no longer preoccupied with reality as such; its method exhausts itself in detecting instances of over-valuation and hypostasis within the spontaneous idealizations of words, and in smoothing them out into the normal functioning of ordinary language.

These illusions induced by language itself are not, of course, imposed on the world from above; they are a mere side effect of the constitutive disparity between words and reality. In oversimplified terms, for instance, there are millions and billions of cats living in this world and only one word, “cat,” to refer to all of them. And since the representational content of this concept is so general and overarching, language quickly leads us into the temptation of assuming that, next to the vast number of specimens, somewhere, even if only in our minds, there also exists the “cat-in-itself.”⁴ And Wittgenstein goes to great pains to convince us that this is not the case. If we are nevertheless determined to catch

⁴ This is why, on the very first page of *The Blue Book*, Wittgenstein states: “We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it” (Wittgenstein 1969a, p. 1).

and seize the incarnated meaning of words—which, for that matter, the entire history of metaphysics was based on, even though it was less concerned with the “cat-in-itself” and more with the concepts of “good” and “evil,” “man” and “animal,” “freedom” and “necessity”—this only means that we illicitly extend two innocent linguistic mechanisms, abstraction and generalization, into idealization. This kind of automatic reification of the ideal is the cause of our greatest errors in reasoning, lapses in thought, everyday illusions, and existential disillusionments. It rests on the assumption that there exists a critical mass of meaning upon which the word is only subsequently bestowed, lending its name to something rounded and necessary. Yet the word never enters a consolidated, structured world, in which it can cling to an ideal, perfected object, but rather cuts into a diffuse and peripheral semantic field of blurred boundaries. As such, it simultaneously unwillingly opens the possibility of engendering new meanings and propels the process of their further shifts. For this reason, in Wittgenstein, the great Meaning of words can never be retrieved from some Platonic heavens, recollected from the intuitions of Forms in our previous lives, or at least drawn from the abstract representations in our “mental lexicon.” Instead, all we are left with is a heterogeneous, inconclusive history of its occurrences in propositions—hence, of its manifold uses:

Philosophers very often talk about investigating, analysing, the meaning of words. But let's not forget that a word hasn't got a meaning given to it, as it were, by a power independent of us, so that there could be a kind of scientific investigation into what the word really means. A word has the meaning someone has given to it. (Wittgenstein 1969a, pp. 27–28)

In all probability, Wittgenstein alludes here to the most legendary of the early philosophical methods, i.e. the Socratic maieutic, which seeks in the interlocutor precisely the “real” meaning of a word allotted to him by a “power independent of

us.” Socrates lets the other talk, he lets him make his own descriptions and specifications of “good,” “virtue,” and “justice,” and, at least in the Platonic dialogues of the middle period, he usually finds in the other the full meaning of the word, spelling out its binding determination. For Wittgenstein, such a “definitive definition” represents the paradigm of all metaphysical illusions, which must be undone with a reverse, downright anti-Socratic method: a sentence aspiring to be a definition must be dissolved into a multitude of statements, which use the word now in this way, now in that.

In brief, nothing seems to bind together the language philosophy of the twentieth century as tightly as the effort to unceasingly reduce the mere possibility of the fixation of a sentence—in its ideal, formulaic, quotational, even definitional form—to actual statements, uttered in concrete situations. Wittgenstein’s greatest merit is certainly that he underpinned and substantiated this somewhat broad-brush operation with a logical foundation: it was his idea that the source of evil lies in the word. Within the general movement of particularizing, profaning, and pathologizing language by virtue of abolishing the veridical autonomy of the sentence and reducing it to the disclosedness of the locus of proposition (Heidegger), the point of the situation (Wittgenstein), the simultaneous half-saying of the place of enunciation (Lacan), contexts (Derrida), discourses (Foucault), dialects (Deleuze), and open sentential forms (Barthes), Wittgenstein seems to have been the only one to recognize the fact that it is solely the word in its wordhood that possesses the power to elevate statements into sentences and make them into trans-contextual truths. It is the word that acts as the minimal impulse of idealization and a trigger of all metaphysical hypostases; it represents the leverage point upon which propositions decontextualize, arrogate, and become Socratic definitions, metaphysical truths, and perennial quotations—something the twentieth century in its innate pragmatism could no longer afford. And with his notorious question

of what the meaning of a word is, Wittgenstein aimed at bereaving the word of the very meaning which confers on the sentence this prohibited aura of saintliness.

It is precisely here that our intervention must set off. For in our interpretation, the declaration of love functions only if it is not a statement but a sentence, i.e., if its meaning is not derived from the situation in which it is uttered, but from resisting the mere possibility of pinning it down to this or that situation. Thus, in order to pursue another, higher, long-spurned life of truth, the ruined semantic dignity of the word must now be rehabilitated.

The Irreducibility of Idealization

Was the notion of escaping the processes of idealization not only a myth of the twentieth century? And did not the word, the most disavowed linguistic form of the era, keep re-entering through the back door as some sort of wondrous object flaring up in certain compulsions of the great philosophers, in the inevitability of their poetic and formulaic self-indulgences? Late Heidegger seems to have made a downright fetish of the word as word. In his paper "Das Wort," an interpretation of a poem by Stefan George of the same name, his attitude is blatantly opposed to the one in *Being and Time*. Here, words are no longer mere tools of "procurring" propositions; instead, the poet's discourse is transformed into a stage upon which the word itself is produced. The word is almost an amulet in which, as it appears, the idea and the thing overlap:

The word's rule springs to light as that which makes the thing be a thing. The word begins to shine as the gathering which first brings what presences in its presence. (Heidegger 1971, p. 100)

Perhaps there is also some faint resemblance between Heidegger conjuring the language of poets and Lacan resorting to

mathematization. His mathemes could well be interpreted as an attempt to transcend the limitations of half-saying; with mathematical formulae, he invented a form which enunciates its truth as a whole, so to speak, and no longer needs to share its truth value with any “place of enunciation.” And, finally, does it not seem that Wittgenstein’s universe, against its very method, constantly proves itself to be incapable of suppressing idealizing impulses and at times even feasts on them?⁵ Wittgenstein himself can be caught red-handed, “relishing the limit of idealization,” so to speak, i.e., detecting and loitering at the place where the word no longer merely breeds illusions, but also acts as the momentum of its innate semantic inertia, an impetus of its own enjoyment and immortality, which cannot be simply abolished by the critical and therapeutic (in Wittgenstein’s sense) labor of philosophy.

The explicit aspiration of *The Brown Book* is certainly to educate our thinking so as to no longer venerate and fetishize words but use them as mundane agents of a multitude of heterogeneous meanings. Nonetheless, somewhere along the way Wittgenstein depicts a surprising scene in which he and his friend enjoy the beauty of flowers so much that they try to undercut the mere possibility of posing a question about their meaning:

I am impressed by the reading of a sentence, and I say the sentence has shown me something, that I have noticed something in it. This made me think of the following example: A friend and I once looked at beds of pansies. Each bed showed a different kind. We were impressed by each in turn. Speaking about them, my friend said “What a variety of colour patterns, and each says something.” [...] // If one had asked what the colour pattern of the pansy said, the right answer would have seemed to be that it said itself. Hence

⁵ Wittgenstein’s own relation to language is not without contradiction. On the one hand, he is the greatest demystifier of language in history; on the other, his private obsession was to collect newspaper clippings with jokes, puns, witticisms, and wordplays, as if he was magically drawn to those instances where language produces a surplus over its usual, everyday function.

we could have used an intransitive form of expression, say “Each of these colour patterns impresses one”. // It has sometimes been said that what music conveys to us are feelings of joyfulness, melancholy, triumph, etc., etc. and what repels us in this account is that it seems to say that music is an instrument for producing in us sequences of feelings. And from this one might gather that any other means of producing such feelings would do for us instead of music. –To such an account we are tempted to reply “Music conveys to us itself!” (Wittgenstein 1969a, p. 178)

Here, it seems that Wittgenstein is trying to warn us against a too monovalent instrumentalization of meaning; by presenting us with an instance where flowers and music “mean nothing but themselves,” he presumably teaches us to diversify as heterogeneously as possible our expectations and procedures in interpreting words. It was Wittgenstein’s pronounced endeavor to debase words into means and tools, and to derive their meaning from particular uses and effects in real life. Nevertheless, he now seems to be admiring an entity, which possesses no aim or benefit whatsoever. At the margins of a pragmatic universe, something utterly nonpragmatic arises, which overrides the basic operations of the system itself: one is unable to stop gazing, as if bewitched,⁶ at something ideal. Wittgenstein speaks of the colors of flowers and the tones of music, but we may wonder if it is not language, which awakens in us a desire to experience this useless “conveying of itself” in the first place. Would it be possible for us to recognize in flowers and music an instance of something that “says itself” if language had not previously put in our hands the matrices of idealization?

⁶ This sudden enchantment with music and flowers, and with a certain sentence as well, could be read against the titanic struggle of Wittgenstein’s philosophy to make us immune to the “witchcraft” of language. In *On Certainty*, he warns us: “The propositions which one comes back to again and again as if bewitched — these I should like to expunge from philosophical language” (Wittgenstein 1969b, § 31).

To display Wittgenstein's denied idealist talent, an even better example could be ferreted out. He himself apparently did not abstain from spelling out the possibility of making a word into an object of unexpected appeal:

Imagine it were the usual thing that the objects around us carried labels with words on them by means of which our speech referred to the objects. [...] That is to say, a label would only have a meaning to us in so far as we made a particular use of it. Now we could easily imagine ourselves to be impressed by merely seeing a label on a thing, and to forget that what makes these labels important is their use. (Wittgenstein 1969a, p. 69)

To be impressed by merely seeing a label—this might be one of the most beautiful concessions to the authentic power of the ideal in philosophy. While the operations of extending and deferring meanings by way of ever new uses of words are still in full effect, on the reverse side of these processes a certain fixation of the word in its wordhood comes about, perhaps resistant to the usual drifting of meaning. It is no longer a case of the word referring to a meaning and, due to the many situations of its use, endlessly shifting its semantic substance; it is rather the meaning which begins to dance around the word itself. And this inversion of reference contains a kernel that transcends the horizon of Wittgenstein's pragmatism; language, invented as a mere means, simultaneously becomes some sort of an end in itself.

To illustrate this point, one might recall the abundance of instances where the word in being uttered provides a kind of higher-level "condensation core" of meaning. The most obvious example of how the ideal discriminants incessantly draw their boundaries across the semantic field is one of the age-old operations of philosophy (as well as, to a certain extent, everyday life), which consists in taking two words of the most similar meaning, distinguishing them, and finally placing them in diametric opposition. In German idealism, for example, reason, *Vernunft*,

differentiated itself from understanding, *Verstand*, as an absolute antipode, even though ordinary (that is, Wittgensteinian) language can hardly articulate the difference between the two. Similarly, Kant's morality could no longer rest merely upon the traditional polarity of good and evil, so each pole was invested with an additional inner distinction, opposing good to well-being, *Wohl*, and evil to ill-being, *Übel*. Moreover, we tend to imagine man as opposed to animal, although in biology there is no clear boundary, or at least no contrariety, between the two. Perhaps the most striking case of this kind of forced opposition is the vulgar antinomy between love and sex, as if the difference between the two is stark and in some way exclusive. It has become a common issue, posed for instance to celebrities in interviews, whether they prefer love or sex. Naturally, in daily existence, the question is strangely meaningless, and the Wittgensteinian mind could quickly reply: "But life never puts me in a position of choosing between the two!" Nevertheless, this minor discrepancy addresses something determinate, and as a consequence, reality itself begins to adapt to this contrived semantic choice: we are suddenly suited to making love without feeling it, or, more importantly, we may even become inclined to loving without having sex.⁷

What we are hinting at here is a peculiar evolution within language itself, an evolution that Wittgenstein underhandedly observes, but does little to untangle. Users of language seem to develop a veritable sensorium for the slightest deviations in the fabric of meaning by virtue of which they can grasp something more than just the circumstances of everyday reality. By breaking

⁷ In its most extreme form, Buñuel's film *Belle de Jour* (1967) depicts the craving of a woman, played by Catherine Deneuve, to purge her marriage of sexual desire precisely by working during the day as a prostitute, i.e., by way of entering into a number of sexual relations that by definition are deprived of love. The entire film might thus be interpreted as one giant, deferred declaration of love: she can only consolidate the love for her husband by having sex with men for whom she feels nothing.

near-synonyms in two, the one concept now designates something pertaining to the given world (“understanding,” “animal,” “sex”), while the other (“reason,” “man,” “love”) represents a downright antithetical excess, generated in the process of idealization. However, it must be stressed that the new “symmetrical opposite” emerges only by way of this operation itself. The “ideal synonym” does not come to light until having been opposed to its original “real synonym,” as it were.⁸ Reason can only define itself on the basis of its antagonism to understanding; the Kantian good can hardly be determined outside its contradistinction to well-being;⁹ man is what he makes of himself only by being juxtaposed to the animal; and love is usually characterized as something that exceeds sexual gratification, even to the point of proving itself by way of sexual abstinence. This capability of symbolically differentiating that which once was nearly indiscriminate is itself an effect of possessing words—a point which should not be taken in the trivial sense of “the limits of language mean the limits of my world,” but in a more specific way, one in which the word in its wordhood unfurls a new, irreducible dimension even with regard to language as a whole. It is the word-form which makes us susceptible to the subtle distinctions according to which *Verstand* is a fact, while *Vernunft* must be reflected upon and educated; animal is a given, whereas man must be self-made; well-being is automatic, good is imperative; sex can be wordless, love must be named. Without the matrix of idealization, provided by the word-form, we would

⁸ Since *every* word offers its body to possible idealization, the binaries listed above are not forever sentenced to assuming fixed places in the structure ideal/real. When love threatens to become a too well-adapted and comfortable form of social economy, its “empirical” twin, sex, can assume the “ideal” function of subverting the bourgeois conformism of loving marriages. When, in the nineteenth century, the concept of man became a socially reactionary symbol, Nietzsche bestowed the role of the “regulative idea” to the concept of animal, admittedly paired with the “ideal” of the *Übermensch*.

⁹ For this reason, Kant’s ethics was regularly reproached with making it impossible for us to be good except *against* our well-being.

never be able to oppose reason to understanding and become spontaneous, autonomous subjects; we could not become ethical beings except by virtue of setting the good against our well-being; and we might never contrast love with sex, thus transcending the contextual, momentary compulsions of lust.

The word-form seems to be nothing but an impulse toward transformation from a means of referring-to-something to an end of being-referred-to itself. The excitement over a “label” may not be some marginal extravagance of thought, a limiting case of (false) use, but ultimately a function around which our lives are structured. A number of examples of this fixation on the ideal can be conjured up, and one of the simplest of these “concrete idealisms” is precisely the phenomenon of love.

What makes love especially interesting in this setting is the fact that Wittgenstein spoke of it rarely and left us with only a few somewhat enigmatic allusions to it. One often comes across the claim that he addressed this subject on one occasion only, in a short note from *Philosophical Investigations*:

Does it make sense to ask “How do you know that you believe that?”—and is the answer: “I find it out by introspection”? // In some cases it will be possible to say some such thing, in most not. // It makes sense to ask, “Do I really love her, or am I only fooling myself?”, and the process of introspection is the calling up of memories, of imagined possible situations, and of the feelings that one would have if ... (Wittgenstein 2009, § 587)

In the preceding paragraphs, the verb “to love” is contrasted with a number of other verbs, such as “to believe,” “to expect,” “to hope,” on the basis of which Wittgenstein shows us that the meaning of the word does not refer to a simple feeling or a state of mind. If, for instance, we believe Goldbach’s conjecture (see Wittgenstein 2009, § 578), the “belief” does not express an inner sensation of possessing this certainty; it consists only in knowing how to use the conjecture, how to apply it, how to explain it in

a given situation. However, love behaves somewhat differently. While it is meaningless to ask ourselves whether we believe something, it apparently makes sense to pose the question of whether we love someone or not. Wittgenstein, revealingly, refuses even to describe the emotions of past love and contents himself with three dots. It almost seems as if he is secretly suggesting that, with love, something else arises, something surpassing all situations and feelings that one would have if... Perhaps, along with all kinds of mundane affections of comfort and proclivity, an additional ideal membrane is produced, one upon which we can love someone just the same, even though we might not feel it as directly in the here and now.

Other references to love, which can be tracked down in Wittgenstein's unpublished works, seem to follow along these lines. For instance, in his late *Zettel*:

Love is not a feeling. It is put to the test [*wird erprobt*], and pain is not. One does not say: "This was not true pain, otherwise it would not have ceased as quickly." (Wittgenstein 1984, §504; my translation)

If pain is a *Gefühl*, love, on the other hand, seems to pertain to a higher dimension. Pain that wears off fast is no less a pain, and we can hardly be wrong about feeling it. But from love we seem to expect more than just this situational placedness, more than just memories of some nausea and intoxication. Perhaps we expect it to make itself independent from the continuity of feelings. What, then, does this test to which love is put consist in? In the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Wittgenstein declares:

"If it passes, then it was not true love." Why was it not in that case? [...] Love, what is important, is not a feeling, but something deeper, which merely manifests itself in the feeling. // We have the word "love" and now we give this title to the most important thing. (Wittgenstein 1980, § 115)

While Wittgenstein's seminal invention was to demonstrate that words only exist within the plurality of essentially "externalized" meanings, he obligates love to refer to something "inner," solid, and firm, a Derridean "transcendental signified" of a sort. There is a thing, and a name is bestowed upon it, fitting it like a glove. It represents the ground value around which everything else is evaluated:

Love, that is the pearl of great price that one holds to one's heart, that one would exchange for nothing, that one prizes above all else. In fact it shows—if one has it—what great value is. One learns what it means to single out a precious metal from all others. (Monk 1991, p. 505)¹⁰

These lines give the impression of abrogating everything Wittgenstein's philosophy fought for. Every painstaking thought experiment from the *Philosophical Investigations* loses its grip in the face of something as deep, unchanging, and substantial as love. Whereas all the other words, or most of them, must settle for the diffuse panoply of possible meanings, love gravitates toward a specific monolithic oneness, the precious metal that lies behind it. Similarly to Wittgenstein's conceitedly "silent" treatment of the ethical and religious dimension, love touches upon a certain tension, perhaps a contradiction, cleaving his universe asunder. It is therefore at this very spot that a fundamental inversion of his operations must be performed.

Wittgenstein's intuitions may have been right, but his solution was all too straightforward. He dissolved the meanings of words into heterogeneous multitudes of "family resemblances," but only to undergird them with instances of a metaphysical correspondence where the thing and the unspeakable word magically overlap, as is the case with "sense," "good," "God," and apparently "love."

¹⁰ These are supposed to be Wittgenstein's own words as quoted by Ray Monk in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*.

We might agree that the word “love” follows a logic that differs from that of the majority of words in our everyday lives; a certain additional regularity in its “uses” does perhaps shine through. Nevertheless, contrary to Wittgenstein, who projected a firm and solid thing behind “love,” it might be suggested that the only “thing of oneness” to which love magically refers to can only be the word “love” itself. In other words, something is at stake with love; however, it is not some-thing but some-word.

Our claim is to grasp the gist of a certain surplus that marks the emergence of love. Of course, the meaning of the concept of love has varied throughout history: at one time, love may have been proved by locking a lady away in an ivory tower, and at another time, by excessive physical acts; some ages believed in its eternity, other in its fleetingness. What interests us here is not the history of the concept, but the specific semantic state in which the very existence of the word “love” triggers a dynamic that transposes love into a realm no longer framed by the Wittgensteinian coordinates of meaning as determined by use. As we have seen, Wittgenstein himself addressed a love-surplus, a certain distinction between the continuity and intensity of the real and the fixity and iterability of the ideal. Nowadays, this distinction is perhaps most commonly perceived in distinguishing love from mere “being-in-love,” or infatuation, as standing for some sort of additional task to overcome the state of immediate inclinations and organize a “life together” that is mostly shared by two people.¹¹ We only seem to be able to pass the test of love

¹¹ This is not to say that this kind of “ordinary” socialization of love makes up its preferred or even exclusive “meaning”; we are in no way interested in any kind of “normativity of love” and only appeal to this social model because it represents a somewhat more “usual” example of switching from the sensible to the ideal. Under specific circumstances, the utmost ideality of love, its most intangible surplus, can well manifest itself in the passionate affairs of adultery, fuelled precisely by the fact that the two lovers are not committed to sharing their everyday world.

by substituting the memory of “real” acts of (making) love for a sphere of celebrating something “ideal.” This of course means that Wittgenstein’s anti-idealist philosophy does not provide him with the right instruments for fully grasping the second, ideal aspect of love; for this reason, love seems to sneak up on him only anecdotally, unwillingly, therewith bearing witness to its own incontrovertibility. Thus, in order to substantiate the claim that love unfolds only on the reverse side of language pragmatics, at least two things must be demonstrated. First, if Wittgenstein’s institute of “use” serves to maintain meaning as an open, fuzzy set of semantic values, then love emerges only negatively and in reaction to this movement; against the incessant semantic pluralism of meaning, love is only crystallized in an instance of a certain “sameness.” And second, the only tool that enables love to surpass this dispersed horizon of manifold uses is precisely that element of language which is in itself an impulse of idealization, namely, the word—in this case “love.” In short, to get at least an inkling of the processes of language that undermine the very foundations not only of Wittgenstein’s philosophy but of the entire twentieth century philosophy of language let us outline a short phenomenology of professing love.

The Idealism of Professing Love

The fundamental move of the philosophy of language of the previous century was to feed the proposition back to the place where it was uttered. It was Wittgenstein who took it upon himself to define the crucial leverage point of this general operation; his question, what is the meaning of a word, lies at the core of reducing sentences with ideal claims to statements placed in real and particular situations. His vast and momentous unsettling of everything taken for granted about language is ultimately based on an ingenious observation that, in this world, a situation of pure

and final denomination never takes place. One can imagine no meaningful context in which someone would say “This is a table,” and thereby exhaust the meaning of the word “table.” At the very beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*, we find a lengthy quotation from *Confessions*, in which Augustine describes having been taught to speak as a child by having had objects shown to him while their names were being pronounced; Wittgenstein calls this an “ostensive teaching of the words,” and, indirectly, giving “ostensive explanations” or “ostensive definitions.” Against this naïve notion, he consistently points out that a child never learns isolated names for ideal objects, but rather only the use of language as a practical means of getting by in the world. And since the meaning of a word has no warranted ideal content, there is no paradigmatic situation in which this meaning would be explicated once and for all. It is hence the word that, by virtue of losing its metaphysical guarantee, represents the lever through which no statement can ever gain the dignity of a sentence.

However, does it not seem that with love the very scandal occurs that, according to Wittgenstein, can never be? It happens, perhaps, that at some point, which possibly even marks the moment of transition from infatuation to love, the Augustinian situation of definite denomination is enacted. It can be argued that the only way to understand the semantics of love is to recognize in the declaration of love an instance not of a statement but of a sentence. Let us therefore sketch out a few forms and circumstances in which love is typically declared.

First, the declaration of love has a tendency of becoming abstract. In an ongoing relationship, a certain transformation of professing love can be observed, one tending toward verbal abstraction. At the time of “being in love,” we might still be prone to be exhaustive and innovative in confessing and articulating our feelings. Perhaps our vocabulary is rich and evocative in describing the characteristics of the other, such as a lock of hair falling over his forehead. We flatter the other, becoming one with him, and

the only way we know how to convince him of our innermost inclinations is by multiplying words. In most cases, of course, we make use of these lavish expressions of affection in the hope that the courtship will result in sexual intercourse. Yet, as time passes, the declarations of love undergo a process of abstraction, so that, in the end, all we are left with to say is: "I love you." The ultimate declaration of love is sparse, formal, and essentially unoriginal. And this reduction is not without purpose; it performs a very specific, indeed sorely needed function of relieving us from the compulsion of constantly having to demonstrate our devotion. At the beginning of a love affair, the signs of our fondness might still be wasteful, but soon enough there come moments when one is perhaps forced to formalize. Sometimes we feel in our hearts a burning desire for the other, to the point of craving to sleep with him tightly embraced all night. When the light goes off, however, there is always too much warmth, squeezing, and breathing between the two bodies. Nonetheless, we are seldom willing to assume responsibility for being the ones who tear ourselves from the hug and turn away. Here, a strategy to help us out of the predicament offers itself: an abstract declaration of love. If in that particular situation we say to the other "I love you," we institute a form which persists according to its own laws, thereby absolving our body from the continuous obligation of expressing love. We are finally allowed to return to our private selves and fall to sleep that is entirely our own.

Second, the declaration of love is prone to indefinite repetition. It has become a typical scene in film, or even in real life, to show a woman of a certain age confronting her husband not with the complaint "Why do you not feel for me what you have felt at the beginning?" but rather with "Why do you not tell me more often that you love me?" Her point seems clear: playing the game of love, she is not interested in realities, such as affections, but in idealities, such as recurring declarations. Love spreads out in a medium different from that of a mere exchange of emotions; it

requires something more than merely a sense of security about what the other feels for us. If one understands the functioning of love properly, one knows that the excuse of having already professed it a few years back, and now being weary of repeating the same thing over and over again, is rigorously invalid. Love inhabits a curious dimension whose reality is framed by ideal coordinates, so that one must proclaim and avow it even if one knows that the other is sure of one's love. It may well be that a declaration of love is essentially redundant. As such, it liberates us from feeling the very feeling that triggered its first articulation. Love, it seems, does not arise until the lovers find a form within which they are no longer compelled to feel it all the time. The most direct consequence of this transition to a higher level of ideality is that love stipulates a certain regularity of its communion; it demands rituals. It is a most common development of the "definite denomination of love" that it gravitates toward coded, ceremonial occasions within the organized time of our daily lives. Over the years, these testimonies of appreciation become less an expression of a momentary inspiration and more and more a symbol of a certain demure, almost liturgical uniformity. In the early phases of infatuation, the declaration of love normally still plays the role of bringing two lovers closer together; often, it is a tool of sexual seduction. Later, however, it begins to represent a kind of monument of temporary distance between the two. Instead of professing love at whatever moment of the day, we become inclined to do it only at separations and departures, i.e., before we fall asleep, at the end of phone calls, when saying farewell at airports, or even when sliding into anaesthesia, from which we may never wake up again. When mutual incompatibilities between two lovers slowly distinguish themselves, saying "I love you" even functions as an act of giving the other the right to relative autonomy. Why are we so liable to profess love precisely at the moment of bidding goodbye? Perhaps because it is a moment of allowing the other to turn away from us, go forth, forget about us, and dedicate himself

to his own concerns. And what we give to the other to take along is not a commitment that we will be thinking about him for the entire period of separation, but a mere form, which will persist even when its content is not present in our minds.

Third, the declaration of love tends to assume the form of a symmetrical inversion. Love life can only hope to endure if it manages to make the passage from the continuity of feeling love to the formalization of professing it. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that the ultimate verification of the fundamental abstractness and repetitiveness of a declaration of love lies in its symmetrical inversion. Why does it seem that the only adequate answer to a profession of love is its mirror image, its symmetrical repetition? It is possible to think out a number of "false responses" to having had love declared. This kind of declaration should never be understood as a specification of a quality, a description of a state, a manifestation of content. We would most probably miss the point if, upon hearing "I love you," we responded with "I agree. I like myself all right," or even "What do you love most about me?" Answering in that way, we would presume that love is fed by reality, and that we ourselves embody its sufficient reason. But there is something about love which circumvents all positive reasons; no one possesses a core fathomless enough to eternally arouse feelings of infatuation in others. Likewise, there would be something wrong in asking back "How come? Have you not been ill-disposed just minutes ago?" Or even: "What is with you all of a sudden? Are you of such feeble spirit that you cannot manage to love yourself?" By replying in that vein, we would falsely surmise that a declaration of love is an expression and innervation of a certain tension in the other, whose intensity he should vouch for. But the games of love are sober and stringent, and if we want to play them, two self-indulgences must first be sacrificed: that we are worthy of love, and that the infatuation of the other is infinite. Thus, by and by, the only thing we are left with in responding to "I love you," is another "I love you," while

the qualities of the beloved and the inner disposition of the lover are allowed to recede into the background.¹²

In brief, we seem to have sketched out the vague contours of a new logical space that unfolds along with love's aim to be professed; the typical biography of love exhibits a propensity to formalized, ritualized, and symmetrically inverse expressions. Emotions can go one way or the other, and no one can control their rising and falling; yet along with these oscillations there persists, in all its immunity, a warranty of a declaration of love that is drawn toward achieving a certain verbal uniformity. Passions decline, sexual prowess wanes, or, even more commonly, an eroticism proliferates that has nothing to do with love any more. However, all these feelings accompanying each declaration do not put the concept of "love" to different uses that would perpetually shift its meaning, but instead display a certain situational impotence to touch the semantics of love. The great test of love does not inquire whether one's emotions are as profound as to ensure continuity, but whether one is able to temporarily set them aside and let the loving be done by words alone. When all is said and done, is not love merely a commitment that, no matter the deviations of sentiments, one will still be able to give the name "love" to something he is sharing with the other? As paradoxical as it may sound, the declaration of love in its most ideal limit might read: "I will continue to declare love to you even when I am not able to feel it anymore."¹³ It is no great secret that

¹² Truffaut's *L'histoire d'Adèle H.* (1975), arguably *the* film on unrequited love, shows a woman, played by Isabelle Adjani, precisely in the state where in response to her endless, impetuous professions of love the beloved man infinitely withholds any acknowledgment or reply. In this intersubjective vacuum, all she can fall back on is the inner intensity of her own feelings, the constancy of which is impossible to maintain. Thus, even though her passion is exuberant and excessive to the point of insanity, at a certain occasion she sends to her lover a note saying: "At this moment, I do not love you."

¹³ Love does not necessarily possess a sensorium for the vacillations in the emotional states of those in love, which is why amorous entanglements are often described with a paradox: "Until it ends, every love is eternal."

in the course of a love relation we come to a point when we still “love” someone without feeling it in the gut. But what is this “love” a name for if we cannot conjure back its original excitement? The only way to resolve this paradox is to transfer love from the realm of real foundations to the realm of ideal products, from sensations to the act of bestowing a name.

What therefore strikes the eye is the stark opposition of this emergent space to the elementary principles of Wittgenstein’s theory and, indirectly, to the principles of a large part of twentieth-century philosophy of language. Let us reduce the innovation and impetus of Wittgenstein’s “revolution” to three conditions. First, the aberrations of a particular language use a priori override the semantics of conventional formulae; the latter receive their meaning and determinacy by way of the former, and not vice versa. From this it follows that, second, there always must be a context, a *Witz*, for a proposition to be understood at all; to put it in simplified terms, someone must have a pronounced need for a hammer for the assertion “Hand me the hammer!” to be articulated in the first place. And third, it also follows that there must be an “objective” sufficient reason which “grounds” and “centers” a situation; there must be a slab lying around somewhere, if the imperative “Bring me a slab!” is to make sense at all. In love, however, things appear to be altogether different. Perhaps the coordinates of its logical space could even be defined by the exact inversion of the three Wittgensteinian parameters. First, the conventional abstraction seems to overdetermine the heterogeneous particularity of language use. Second, it is the very function of the ceremonial repetition to invalidate the contingencies of being placed within a situation. And third, the mirror image or symmetrical inversion only serves to bracket the validity of sufficient reasons. As we will see, these inversions have consequences for the function of the love-professing subject, for the function of the object of the declaration of love, and for the place where the two intersect, i.e., the situation in which love is ultimately professed. First, a certain hollowing out of the

subject, his “locus of proposition,” takes place; we do not have to mean it in order for the declaration of love to succeed. Second, a certain lack of the object comes to light; we do not have to refer to anything real, i.e., point to a positive quality of the beloved, in order for love to be declared. Third, a complex situation of professing unfolds, which keeps any possible situation at bay; through repetition, love somehow tends toward only being declared within the blind spots of space and the loopholes of time.

It is here, in this specific spacio-temporality of professing love, that the difference between Wittgenstein’s and our own theory of the meaning of a word becomes most clearly visible. Wittgenstein is a sworn philosopher of everyday life, of a *Lebensform*; every word must stand the test of its most concrete application in a situation, that is, of its use. We, on the other hand, brought to light a certain type of proposition that tends to be asserted within the very slipstream of time when everyday life weakens its pragmatic control over determining meaning; our emphasis was on the declarations proclaimed at partings, celebrations, birthdays, and anniversaries. Against the philosophy of the workday, we have opposed the philosophy of the holiday, as it were. And within these exempt moments, language ceases to be a mere tool of transferring information and becomes itself an object of a specific enjoyment. With time, we no longer profess love in order to let the other know that we love him—for he may as well know that already. We only declare it for the sake of declaring; and what we thereby point at is merely the pointing itself. The success of a declaration of love thus gradually becomes less dependent on what it expresses, and more dependent on the satisfaction brought about by its articulation. Contrary to twentieth century pluralist pragmatism, in love the usage of words, whose purpose is to cause certain praxes, is replaced by the act of professing, which must be maintained in its very quality of being professed.

In other words, the key to professing love lies precisely in no longer being exposed to the fluctuations of momentary moods

and the inclinations of the “place of enunciation”; it lies in persisting in the background of a love relationship as an instance of the sameness of a sentence, which no particular, situational enunciation can underpin or overwrite. Just as with Wittgenstein’s flowers and music, love conveys nothing but itself, so it does not point to something that can be grabbed and used; instead, it, so to speak, strives to carve a statement in the marble of the air. To put it another way, when a lover professes his love for us, we should never take him at his word; rather, we should take his word for it. We best not grub for what lies behind but allow the declaration itself to resonate in the dignity of a sentence.

How could this new logical space of professing love be bindingly defined in terms of the philosophy of language? The issue can be solved in one move. Love accustoms us to cultivate a technique of professing it, which is clearly opposed to the tendency of reducing propositions to their locus. In Wittgenstein, a sentence can only be “understood” if it is transformed into a statement; the meaning of a sentence depends on what someone meant by uttering it. Accordingly, every time Wittgenstein is faced with a “sentence,” i.e., a statement which sounds too abstract and construed, he asks whether there can be a meaningful context in which stating it can have any sense at all. Is it possible, for instance, to imagine a particular scene where it could be conceivable what someone meant by saying “this is pain”? Inversely, while ordering coffee can only be meaningful in a café and not, for instance, in a shoe shop, the mechanics of love places its articulation in a more complex situation. In our view, the only way to decipher the context of professing love is to establish that it is a pseudo-Augustinian antisituation. This means that the real object of love is not the thing to which the word refers, but rather the word which is being proclaimed. In love, the fact that the word is pronounced overdetermines any possible meaning this word might evoke or signify.

Of course, if the focal point around which love revolves is its own “professedness,” then love loses its substantial status of

a simple and immediate state of mind. Why is it that two lovers so often draw forth the question: “Have you already said ‘I love you’ to each other?” An overhasty answer would imply that love is not something that is simply there, waiting to be declared only subsequently; what is there are merely impulses, leanings, and desires, which only become love once they are designated as such. Love is not something to be named; it is something that emerges by being named. But there is more to it than this almost trivial logic. The more essential point is that with love a certain fundamental function of language seems to reverse its trajectory. The real concern with love is not whether the lovers have substantiated enough emotion in their hearts to eventually confess to it; rather, the issue is whether, within the continuum of emotive situations, they have managed to hollow out the antisituation, where love itself could be uttered. The gist of saying “I love you” for the first time might not consist in increasing the intensity of feeling it to the point of making it burst out in a declaration, but in achieving the first distance to the inner tension of feelings, i.e., in finally reaching the state in which one no longer clings to words in order to grasp some part of reality, but rather lets reality recede and make room for the emergence of the profession itself. This is why we usually declare love for the first time only once we become aware of the fact that the beloved is no longer constantly on our minds, that he does not occupy the entire space of our thoughts any more. It seems that in order to love one must first be able to occasionally forget the beloved for a while. While the situations of daily reality force us to utter replies, exclamations, imperatives, descriptions, and narratives, the artistry of loving commonly consists in knowing how to suppress its imminent declaration and to postpone it until the non-place within time and space is sought out and unfolded. And it is in this very skill that a certain fundamental change of object manifests itself. While the body and soul of the beloved may be the primary object of love, its ultimate object rather hinges on the acts of its own professing—on uttering the word itself.

We have come upon the most crucial point, and this inversion in the use of language, this change of the original function of words, deserves some elucidation. In love, we no longer use words to refer to things; we reduce things to mere occasions, by aid of which we can finally refer to “love.” Perhaps it is possible to demonstrate how the very evolution of a typical “biography of love” is nothing but one colossal expression of this reversal of the direction of reference, where “love” forfeits its initial referential function of pinning down a situation, instead itself becoming a referent to which a certain generalized and totalized reality claims to have a permanent recourse. In the early phases of a love affair, the word “love” might still serve as the usual “differential designator.” We “love” this and that about the beloved: his feet, his voice, his modesty, etc.; it is arguably more a case of “liking” than “loving.” The word still plays its customary role of distinguishing and specifying reality. By means of it, we pinpoint what we like in order to discriminate it from other things (“I love you more than anything else!”), thereby elevating the beloved into a distinctive object of love. In this early phase, it is not uncommon to suffer from a (however sweet) compulsion to like “every single thing” about the beloved; love makes us proverbially blind, incapable of recognizing the disadvantages of the other. At some point, however, this hard labor of constant differentiations of qualities that we like against the negative ones that we merely gloss over wears itself out. The positive reasons of love tend to run out. And now, against the overbearing hegemony of everyday life with its fluctuations of likes and dislikes, the usual amorous digging up of trenches against the outside world can be absolved by the abstract declaration of love. Hence, the lover declares: “I love you.” The beloved might at first even reply: “Oh? Is it my full hair? Or my slender body?” But the lover insists: “No, you don’t understand. It is *you* that I love.” Behind the multitude of positive qualities with which “I” once fell in love, the instance of “you” crystalizes. But since “I” only posited “you” in order to put an end to the constant playing of the

likes against the dislikes, this “you” that I love is precisely *not* the profound essence behind the lovable appearances, as Wittgenstein might have thought, but rather a blank space that will finally enable “love” to free itself from having to pinpoint this or that on the object of love, discriminate it from the rest of the world, and overlook its possible detriments. With “you” that I love, I do not begin to love “every single thing” about you. On the contrary, a most stringent and definite structural turn is performed here. By having love declared, I have instituted a logical space of a certain totality, in which love ceases to serve as a differentiating factor of reality, and instead becomes an ideal guardian of the fundamental indiscrimination of the entire space shared by me and you. Under the banner of love a specific “everything” now unfolds, while the “you” of the declaration only stands for the logical mark of its universalization. In other words, what love usually strives for is to establish a new universe of “everything,” in which every single like and every single dislike can start referring to the same ideal framework. Does not love also consist in setting up a space of freedom where one is even allowed some quirks that the partner does not care for? For only now, within the realm of ideal concessions, can love life finally let in all the vestiges of imperfection which once had to be overlooked. Henceforth, I might begin to admit to myself (or even to you) that I dislike your hands or the way you eat. But even if I bump into you in the bathroom in the morning, I might recognize in your bland appearance a token of love; and it is not because I distinctly like faces without make-up, but because, by showing me your unflattering side, you testify to partaking in the very “everything” that love has inaugurated. In a nutshell, love is not about distinguishing and identifying its ground in reality, its ultimate reason, its mystical *x*; it is about instituting an indiscriminate field of reality where suddenly everything, even drawbacks, can avail itself of an essentially declared ideality. This, precisely, is the reversal of reference. And perhaps the only tool qualified to accomplish this turn is that element of language

which provides the genuine “impulse of idealization,” namely, the word. The word alone in its predisposition to being elevated into a monument of pronunciation is capable of breaking out of the horizon of referential correspondence to a real object, without, in its newly objectless state, withdrawing into the ivory tower of idealism; instead, the word becomes the very force that carries out the process of normalization and neutralization of reality.

Many examples from the daily phenomenology of love validate this point. That the word “love” in the phrase “I love you” is ultimately not a “designator” or an “identifier,” but itself a referent, comes best to light in the fact that it begins to represent some sort of “background support point” that one can fall back on at any time. Instead of using it to express what we like as opposed to what we dislike, we soon start using it as some sort of “ideal umbrella” under which the entire reality of a love relationship with all its deviations must be put up with. It seems to function as a constant possibility of recourse when life exhibits its less lovable aspects. One often hears a film character utter the phrase “yes, you made a mistake, but I still love you,” thereby implying that there exists an inconsumable amount of love that the particular aberrations are incapable of affecting directly. Or when someone is faced with the other leaving him, he sometimes appeals to this preestablished whole by saying “but don’t we love each other?”, as if, even though helpless against the overwhelming evidence of particularities, the totality is still somewhat hesitant to bid goodbye. Similarly, by the very fact of having love declared, we are likely to forfeit the right to use it as a tool for discriminately manipulating the beloved, say, in the manner of: “If you do that, I will continue to love you, and if you don’t, I will stop.” For “love” has already lost the power of differentiating and instead assumed the role of the guardian of totality that must be presupposed in order to subsequently release the space of possible negotiations of what we want or do not want from the other; henceforth we can surely bargain and make deals, but without appealing to love.

It is under these terms that we can now venture an (almost grammatical) analysis of the declaration of love. Semantically speaking, the final remit of the delicate technique of professing love seems to be to enact the “situation of definite denomination” in which the word in its wordhood becomes the true referent of the sentence. How, then, can this apotheosis of the word within a sentence be reconstructed? We can start by pointing out that the “you” in “I love you” plays the role of an antireferent, a void which rearranges the entire field of assignments. It stands for the lack of positive reasons of love and the subsequent indiscrimination of love’s reality, which manifests itself mostly in the normalization of everyday life. And this emptiness at the heart of “you” now shifts the motive for uttering the declaration “I love you” from the object to the verb itself. To repeat, love is not there to point to you; you are there to point to love. This is why a certain change of emphasis in pronouncing the words in the sentence “I love you” can sometimes be observed. In the fresh stages of love, one might still say “I love you,” as if to reassure oneself of whom one loves, or to signal to the other that everyone else is excluded. But then the usual articulation gravitates toward accentuation: “I *love* you.” For “you” are now already certain, and there is no third around to be loved. However, by stressing the word “love,” I demonstrate that I have swallowed my pride and converted the blissful diffusion of emotions into an event of having this sole word finally verbalized. After all, this is also what the beloved commonly wants to hear: not that he is the deep reason of love, but that I have managed to bring the very word to the surface. He does not want to be loved rather than others and their real qualities but towards love and its ideal warranty. Here, one could even take up the old Spinozist logic of having to love the other back on account of not having given any cause to receive his love in the first place, and transfer this logic from the level of affects to the level of words. When “you” realize that you are not the true object of the declaration of love, but a mere placeholder of

the resonance of the verb “to love,” it is a matter of taste that you undo the illusion that the declaration was actually aimed at you. By replying: “I love you,” you concur that you know that it is in fact not you but love that is being sanctified. In other words, the function of the symmetrical repetition of the profession of love is to invalidate the remaining traces of the objectal reference of the first declaration. In Spinoza, we return the affect; here, we only corroborate the fact that it has only been about words all along. Thus, in hollowing out by way of symmetrical inversion both the subject and the object, me and you do nothing else but monumentalize the word “love.” It is in this sense, and in this sense alone, that a declaration of love is only adequately “understood” if it is not interpreted as a statement, but rather as a full-blown sentence. For it is no longer a case of a statement conveying our feelings, pointing to objects, and placing us in situations, but a case of a sentence being conceived as a stage for the verbalization of a single word.¹⁴

To return to our Augustinian theme, the coordinates of professing love that we have outlined, i.e., abstraction, conventionality, inverse symmetry, and ritualism, seem to enact in a straight form, albeit on a new, higher level, the scene of pointing and giving a name, a scene prohibited in the universe of linguistic pragmatism. Wittgenstein’s critique of Augustine rests on unmasking the naivety of enacting “pure, noncontextual situations,” as if a child can be taught to speak in a vacuum of bare words and ideal objects.

¹⁴ From this, a certain preliminary and still very formal philosophical definition of “word” could be derived: the word is the ideal impulse upon which every contextual statement always possesses a minimal, irreducible surplus of a sentence. Not only can a sentence never be uttered outside this or that situation, thus becoming a statement, but it is also not possible to utter a statement without simultaneously instituting a transcontextual sentence—something the twentieth century was so unwilling to take account of. Even Derrida’s quotations are only there to incite new contexts, which serve to displace once more the original meaning of words.

Wittgenstein insisted that we only learn language inasmuch as we need it, and not superfluously. We never simply learn words; we only learn them insofar as they are comprised in sentences, that is, in statements which effectuate this or that. However, by saying “I love you,” we seem to enact the very thing of pragmatic impossibility: a superfluous pronunciation of a word. The profession of love therefore amounts to the pseudo-Augustinian declaration “this is love” that isn’t trying to move something in the world but is rather only making the word itself be heard.

To be sure, we first had to earn this unique, redundant, and excessive opening of the Augustinian logical space of mere words being called out. The “return to Augustine” must thus be properly understood; it is, as it were, a return executed “under Wittgenstein’s conditions.”¹⁵ Our Augustinianism consists in the fact that professing love can only be grasped if its reason is no longer conceived to be real, but essentially ideal. Nevertheless, there are three crucial differences that must be pointed out. First, Augustine could still rely on the warranted ideality of meaning; between the table pointed at and the word “table” exclaimed, the entire meaning was explicated. Second, the Augustinian situation presupposed the full presence of the referent; his parents indicated

¹⁵ Again, by replacing the pre-Wittgensteinian *idealism of meanings* with post-Wittgensteinian *idealism of words*, we tried to follow Wittgenstein’s steps so as to surpass them. It was he who, against Augustine, taught us to never—except, ironically, when it comes to love itself!—reach *behind* words; it suffices to know how to *act upon* them. When hearing the other cry “I am in pain!,” we do not need to *relieve* this pain; if we take him to the doctor, we understand everything there is to understand about this proposition. We have to realize the point of the situation, and that is all. Consequently, Wittgenstein’s word has no backside, only a multitude of front sides; instead of one meaning, it has many uses. However, it was our intention to discern another, inverse even, phenomenology of “using” language. In contrast to everyday speech acts, a profession of love functions as a test of whether one can resist the temptation to pin it down to the context of its declaration. Perhaps the ultimate question posed to us by the test of love is: *Are you capable of hearing a statement and understanding it as a sentence?*

the visible objects of this world, such as a table, a chair, a spoon, or a fork. And, third, the learning process was irreversible and cumulative. Augustine memorized words in order to know them once and for all; and after having learned them, he never had to ask for them again. We, on the other hand, have taken Wittgenstein's lessons seriously. There is no love behind the word "love" in the same way as there was the Augustinian fullness of the table behind the word "table." However, this "lack of the definitive object" engenders its own, entirely trans-Wittgensteinian logic. One must say "I love you" precisely when and because there is no love lying around. And since love is built upon this original groundlessness, it is in need of a new ontological justification. There is no palpable thing at the end of the pointing finger, so the situation of the pointing must, in return, be reenacted indefinitely. Because love is in the process of losing its original object, it can only substitute this lack by repeating its declarations. Or, expressed from the opposite side, the only possible object of the contextually immune recurring sentence is the ideal impulse of the word. This is why the value of Wittgenstein's turn is in no way diminished, and his critique of Augustine is still valid; in order to recap the Augustinian "scene of definite denomination," we had to leap over from the realm of real objects to the realm of ideal ones. And here we arrive at the decisive difference between Augustine's learning of words and our professing of them. While in Augustine the ideal element, which, after all, represents the sufficient reason for learning words, was the great Meaning, i.e., the platonic Form authorized and justified by God, our ideal foundation, the trigger of the processual, self-referential ritual of professing love, is not the metaphysical content of love, but the great Word itself. To put it in simplified terms, Augustine's parents uttered single, decontextualized words so that he could learn what they meant; our lovers, on the contrary, must already know what the word "love" means and suppress the endless deviations of its meaning, so that they could pronounce it in its noncontextual,

ideal purity. The word is the only object of the “real” world whose repetitive quality produces enough “ideality” to be able to instigate its own drives; it is only within the ideal sameness of the word that the sole motive for pronouncing it lies. The magical object, around which the entire obsession with love revolves, is thus the nonmetaphysical guarantee that, in this godless universe of shifting meanings, wavering subjects, and unworthy objects, the only constant that the recurring sentence can name over and over again is the sameness of the word.

Towards a New Definition of Word

Simultaneously with the profanation of language, the twentieth century also raised language into “a limit of my world,” “a text with no outside,” a prison with no escape, a horizon that cannot be trespassed. However, in our view, the question posing itself is not only how to recognize the outside world through the lattices of language, but also, inversely, how to catch sight of the pure ideality of the word through the unordered continuum of the world, which indiscriminately blends things, events, movements, relations, gestures, signals, and finally statements.

Against the semantic pluralism of the twentieth century, we have pointed out a different, recursive life of language, where the meaning achieves a certain fixation and discrimination in the moment when its referent becomes the word itself. The word “love,” for instance, is a most ordinary tool for expressing our inclination toward an object; however, in its very inert wordhood it can provoke an idealist turn, so that the object of love becomes a mere occasion, at which we begin to refer to the word “love” itself. To Wittgenstein’s question, what is the meaning of a word, we might thus reply that it is a hill with two slopes: on the one side, there is the multitude of its ordinary uses, while on the other, this very increase in the possibilities of use as a means

to mean something provokes the word to become an ever more exclusive motive of its own pronunciation. It is thus a case of a means becoming an end, and an instance of ordinariness inducing idealization. Seen from this angle, the word as word appears within language as some kind of a foreign body, a negative boundary, which ultimately undermines the power of everyday life to endlessly redefine its meanings. Perhaps the following definition could be written down: the word is a form whose every use opens a logical space in which the word itself can seize and occupy one of the meanings.

Since there is a word only for every ninth thing, as Ivan Cankar famously said, perhaps the tenth thing will someday descend to Earth; and this thing will be precisely the word in its being uttered. What is more, Cankar's lamentation of there not being any words for the most painful things might be a mere consequence of the fact that the moment the word becomes "its own thing" it begins to harbor illusions that it is a name for something fuller, deeper, and unspeakable—the illusions Wittgenstein could never resist. But the only depth of this world is the surface of the word. It is for this reason that we must not remain silent, as Wittgenstein commanded, but must continue to utter certain words, because it is the only way to disenchant their meanings.

Bibliography

- Barthes, Roland (1989) *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1980) *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit).
- Derrida, Jacques (1988) *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press).
- Foucault, Michel (1989) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge).

- Heidegger, Martin (1962) *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell).
- (1971) “Words,” *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row).
- Lacan, Jacques (2007) *The Seminar, Book XVII. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company).
- Monk, Ray (1991) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage).
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1969a) *Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigations,” generally known as the Blue and Brown books* (New York: Barnes & Noble).
- (1969b) *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell).
- (1980) *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).
- (1984) “Zettel,” *Über Gewißheit, Werkausgabe*, Vol. 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp).
- (2009) *Philosophische Untersuchungen / Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell).