

Maja Delak & Luka Prinčič: UNE FAÇON D'AIMER / WAYS OF LOVE

Intertwinement of Power Relations

The scrutiny of establishing connections through the instant experience of collective consciousness, which fixates one into the compressed time of a single frame, reveals the entire truth of a certain moment as the pure sublimity of libidinal energy.

In *Ways of Love*, Maja Delak and Luka Prinčič constitute, through corporeality and technology, the framework within which they construct a syntax that expands beyond language: it constitutes an environment which provokes the sensation of a certain undefined sentimentality to emerge. However, what we are dealing with here is the emotionality, which in the gap of performativity turns out to be a medium, which is capable of unmasking the unfathomable essence of this dramaticity: when one consciousness becomes the copy of another – a live code through the form of the body, which all of a sudden begins to express itself in the authentic – schizophrenic conversation with itself.

Such emotional signifiers pluralise perception. Thus, the representation of the contents in the form of sampling/sequencing of various content references reflects the level of a certain fundamental human instinct. On certain points, the formation of such a collage proves to be a kind of a futuristic impulsive act of the primordial, savage mind, which compresses the content of the complex signification of the palimpsest multilayeredness of meanings into a referential layering of writings, with which Maja Delak and Luka Prinčič metaphorise the veiling and unveiling of layers of meaning. These layers reflect in our visual field as sequences – as explicit poetic iconography, which in contrast to their dynamic action sublimely “comments” on various levels of violence, pain, power(lessness) ... While the writings on their intertwined bodies can be at the same time read as the complexity of the intertwinement of power relations, which are never defined once and for all.

The deconstruction of representative surfaces and the contents, presented through different media languages, function in service of different (in)sights, which constitute fields of suspense – unbearableness in the zone of (dis)comfort. The sobering moment arises every time we tear ourselves away from them because of a certain new action and confront the dystopia of the real, which acts as a metaphor for the insight into the reality of momentary fiction. These situational intrusions, which continue to evolve throughout the performance, in fact present a kind of media activism – a tactics of resistance, an escape from the repressive strategies of the environment, which infringe certain standards and, under the guise of individualism and free choice, force the individual to position her/himself into the most diverse target groups. At the same time, these intrusions present a reflection on social relations in the widest sense, since they are devised with the awareness about the social and cultural reality, which is always dependent on power relations within the social matrix. What we are dealing with in this kind of artistic practise is the so-called alternative with a critical potential – an awareness about and the strategicalness of individual behaviour. And primarily, with the constitution of criticalness, which – through the performative frame – constitutes a membrane that opens up the possibility of alternative realities: from the reality of man to the reality of the performative body as a screen, which is disappearing into the projections of its own desires... Or as Stelarc writes for one of his projects: “The body finds it increasingly difficult to match the expectations of its images.”

In *Ways of Love*, the body (as an image) examines the position of sexual identity, its roles, and limits between the public and the private. All the actions are aesthetically and ethically

positioned in a relationship which indulges in playing with non-aesthetic elements of overabundant emotion, even kitsch, but at the same time also positions it into a new environment. As a result, these elements become referential material, which serves as the basis for the critique of the society of spectacle, which is through the media-modified perspective always postulated as a representative fetish. At the same time, this critical reflection of overabundant emotion also calls for a certain media ecology, which is primarily reflected in the television/video iconography, which is formally (at first glance) a mere explication of the cliché: the referential iconography of a sexual remix is compressed into a small screen miniature and a story, which is, of course, without a proper beginning or an end. However, we come to establish, gradually, that these referential images are not as cliché-like as they seemed at first. They exist in our consciousness as half-conscious phantasms which leave us, compressed to the most primary fetishistic signifiers, in the area of total suspense ... of utopian gender ... And offer a possibility for the emancipation from power relations.

Maja Smrekar

Way, Pain, Manner, Action

At first glance, it might seem that the English title "Ways of Love" is in a way horribly bold, that it implies a certain a priori manifestation of unequivocalness, of all-knowingness, a certain crafted image, frozen in its immovable details, which invite slobbering over the schematics and form, and the filling of this form with the viewer's projections. The French "façon" indeed speaks about the *way*, but also about the *manner*, about a very basic question of *how*. Many years back, an older man said to me that it does not matter in the slightest where, when, why, or with whom, but that what is most important is *how* an act is done. "Façon" speaks also about enactment and action; and implies, along with being of the female gender in French, the principle of activity.

The easiest way to enter the multitude of themes that flow through one another in the present performance is possibly through the apparently most mundane one, but which may, after sustained scrutiny, turn out to also be the most enigmatic one: love. The true enigma of this miracle is concealed with many a veil. It is about the social normativity of what this miracle is and what its function in our lives is. It is about the myth of love, which in its frozen ideal form contains no forms of pain or violence whatsoever. We all supposedly move toward this ideal manifestation of love, struggle through the unpleasant and tiring twists of painfully distressing wounds, the dark tunnel with a blindingly white end in the distance. A true Hollywood sweetheart in black-and-white. However, the above ironisation is not about the existentialistic, nearly cynical, yielding to pain and a world inhabited by violence and tragedy (the pseudo-sense of tragic stupefaction), but is about an active perspective, a bold beholding of one's own and the beloved's blood, which suddenly acquires a certain cleansing potential of growth.

Growth, blows, pain, blood imply corporeality, the flesh. The materiality of being places us in the world, into the flesh (which is world), amidst *others*, and when we dare to reveal the body, expose it to an unavoidable blow, we mark the contingency and the im-pressing of the self in the other: our embodied existence and self-conception are entirely founded on relations with others. It is about "this miraculous relation, a contract between the things

and myself, with which I give them my body so that they may inscribe their likeness into it." With the beholding of pain, a constitutive element for *the way of love* (also of oneself – the narcissism of performing the self inevitably connects the self with the other), we approach masochism as a force, which deterritorialises the inviolence, inscribed into our bodies by the norms and the related power structures. From this perspective, masochism poses a constant threat to the status quo, a threat to the capitalist appropriation and fetishisation of violence as the way toward comfort as the consumerist way of life. In this masochism, where the law – the imperative and the entrapment – is intensified and amplified to the limit, the edge, where no logical causality between pain and pleasure exists but only a descent from the law to the consequences, in this masochism, there is a certain *humour*. Its figures are disavowal, suspense, and phantasm. Like the (mysterious) laughter associated with Socrates' death or the reading of Kafka's *The Process*.

The processes of disavowal and suspense, the essential elements of masochism, define fetishism. The following intricate articulation seems crucial: "The fetish is, therefore, not a symbol at all, but, as it were, a frozen, arrested, two-dimensional image, a photograph to which one returns repeatedly to exorcise the dangerous consequences of movement, the harmful discoveries that result from exploration." In such an articulation, the process of fetishisation surprisingly evades the dichotomy of the symbolic/real order and transforms into a certain tool, the pivot of forces, which can, on the one hand, function as an agent for enactment, self-realisation, life, and awareness about desire and perversion, and on the other, as a freezing of a relationship into a *vow*, which alienates itself away from the incessantly transforming love relationship, relationship in becoming, relationship in an intertwining chiasm.

The intertwining chiasm: "nothing is given to the viewer as construed beforehand". Namely, intersubjective chiasm is an intertwinement with which the embodied other constitutes the gaze of the viewer/subject. It is far from being empty at first, nor is it opened up to the subject only later. What we are dealing with here is a kind of "touching" with seeing. In the radically technological world, the body/flesh is actually the image/self. And also the sound/machine. And noise/body. Therefore, the present performance is an exploration of a certain language, which is an intense intertwining of music, sound, photography, video, noise, text, and performative actions. An intertwining, in order to in-circle that something which cannot be directly addressed without a certain danger, since there is always a constant threat that it will be frozen into an inaccurate definition, a definition of love.

Love is a process, indispensable for collective self-transformation, if we want to be able to govern ourselves. In other words, a process which functions between dictatorship and spontaneity. It is a kind of a polygon, a plateau of exploration and cultivation of own autonomy, which we do not yet know how to enact in all its (social) potentiality. This very plateau is the place where we can become autonomous, self-governing, without supervisors, directors, managers, and presidents. Because love – in contrast to friendship or solidarity – entails the potential for transformation. It is precisely the transformation of the way (façon) that can be affected by pleasure, lust, perversion, desire, thought, pain, force, violence. And laughter.

Luka Prinčič

(Paraphrases and quotations from: Amelia Jones, *Bodyart: Performing the Subject*; Gilles Deleuze, *Presentation of Sacher-Masoch: Cold and Cruelty*; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*; Michael Hardt, *On Love*, lecture, European Graduate School 2007.)

Tempting, Painful, Aberrant Perseverance

In war and love, everything is permitted. So goes the well-known and time-honoured catchphrase. After a cold consideration, it may, at best, propel us to the two extremes: Does not the common “permittedness”, on the one hand, present, in fact, the affirmation of the animalistic or parental “unconditional love”, and on the other, an appeal to the attractive crime of passion? Inasmuch as it is not one and the same thing. Which is often the case. The perversion of love “as such” rests in another place, precisely in the place in-between, between the two extremes, where there is no way of saying how to act, how to “behave”, in an incessant present, where ‘twoness’ exists precisely because it makes no sense, where the means are distributed according to the painful imagination spectre rather than as in the arsenal of senseless battles, conquests, gaps, advances. We are fascinated by love when it abandons the body; when it is disembodied from the unbearable closeness; when it departs from itself, if you will, and acts out the solitude in the dual; a doubled individual. My dear, this is “our song”, remember? An utmost narcissistic statement about the imagined reciprocity which sounds as equally preposterous as the psychotic’s question about the music that the great patron Fritzl listened to in his leisure time. Both are part of a cover, a symbolic function, which at best fits only to scenarios that are excessively corporal. What we are interested in is something else, the perversion of love as an overfilled, overblown boredom. A period of disease, intended that we might actually, in twos, hear the infinitely stretched out common sound, see the shift in the image, anticipate the stained spectre of the inseparable remnant, the artificially sustained collective. Only thus-conditioned bodies can come to be close again “afresh”.

In a certain mad way, we should sustain love only and solely when “we are not yet ready” for “it”; when there is no superfluous emotion, forcing us toward the urgency of a certain romance, affair, fling, infatuation, illusion. Then, we would be heading straight toward the real problem, which is far more interesting and, all in all, far more productive than the affected experience itself. Without speaking in vain, without being lost for words, without losing ourselves in the web of lies, euphoria and compliments, without losing the precious time, we would take part in an open form, which would immediately make us realise what it is all about. As a matter of fact, we should reverse the optics and achieve in our everyday life that which we so admire in artism. The idea that the masters of love – the seducer, the seductress – are kinds of swingers, persons with “a lot of experience”, is not true. Quite the opposite. The masters of love acknowledge one another repeatedly through a single – though possibly every time another – relationship, at a distance, where a departure means also a temporal, primarily a temporal, component. Space-time of the masters of love is not tempting; it is covered with dust, out of the focus offered by the authorised, media, spectacle interpretation. Space-time of the masters of love admits ways and functions of love when they are at hand as well as when there are no traces of them at all. The different ways, the ways the majority need only to justify the reality of introductory notes.

Surely, “we” did not ask for a love like that. Nor do “we” want it. We are coerced into it by an external imperative, the comfort of a political class, the supreme biotope, which under the flag of democracy (read: democracy as “petite bourgeoisie revolution”), at best, proclaims reproduction, family, sexuality, which subsumes a dog-like devotion. And people are dogs, and by no means sheep. Sheep are too much alike to be able to satisfy the withdrawal into perseverance offered to us in view of a unificational morality. If anywhere at all – besides the strains in “intermedia” art – then this can be discerned through *hard-core* pornography.

As of recently, it has been permeated only with stuffing the throat with flesh, exasperate spitting and vomiting, nibbling the toes, trampled-on faces, Russia, endless banging in the ass, now tanned now reddened skin, in short, a new sampling, which has no connection whatsoever with the fetish or sadomasochistic practices, but has, as such, simply lost all purpose or direction.

If ever, then it is today that we – as individuals – confront the opportunities for new activations, ways of love yet unknown. Benumbed and insane from biopolitics, we no longer know what we had to overcome with our “life empiricism” or what was provided for us by the (global) temporal fatality in the meanwhile – and the distinction between the two is no longer known to us. On coming to the bitter realisation that “culture”, “intercultural dialogue” or “the clash of civilizations” do not exist in the world as we know it – and never did – we can invent again and again new microethics to satisfy the fact that we are always naked, barefoot, yet ever so inventive in front of that “cultural” (there is still no other expression!) practise, which can be resolved only in a face-to-face relationship, thus, most often in love. Every instance of activism sooner or later bangs against the wall named state-nation. Every instance of activism eventually robs us of intimate sensations. However, only as such does it enable a new creation, this time, in twos. Benumbed and insane from a virtual public, confined to a systemic black hole, staring to miniscule screens, we distinguish the other, who is an “opposite”; but only insofar as this other inhabits “the same”. So it seems that we are approaching nearer and nearer to “cosmic love” of kindred spirits: we want to provoke, to do the same identical stuff to one another. What seemingly presents itself as *new age* is, as a matter of fact, a consequence of precisely the opposite process: The heroic unequivocal mind, which makes us ready and willing to be interested in, from the cradle to the grave, in other bodies, their capabilities, deceptions, hollows, outgrowths and effects, while their one-dimensional, glazed, glaring look lures us – each and every one – to think the identical thought: Strike! Caress! Run! Rip! Look! Remove! Come! Feed! In an interaction of love bites and sweet-talk, with kitsch and alternative, focuses and blurs, we heroically push toward the end, where there is no identity whatsoever, let alone sexual one. The tempting, painful, aberrant perseverance is well on the road to integrity, that is, to the “internalisation” of the revolution. And what we should be watchful of is no longer love on the stage or on the screen, but love in the stalls – its sound gurgling in the underground of a dependable machine, its look glistening through a narrow, yet bright channel.

Miha Zadnikar