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# Being a sign



# LOVE GESTURES

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## ABSTRACT

A comparison between words of love, love letters, proofs of love and love gestures leads us to define the specificity of the latter. From this, we explore what the gesture of love has of a sign in the sense of Peirce. Analyzing the economy of the jouissances involved in the gesture of love allows us to find the value that sign has for the partner. Finally, the coordinates of the difficulty involved in the performance of love gestures are established and compared with those corresponding to the analytic experience.

## KEY WORDS

love | gesture | sign | jouissances | dignity | singularity

In a time like this, that hate and violent passions not only prevail (to the point of mobilizing whole populations in an increasingly heated world), but also monopolize the interest and concern of the global intellectuals in a good and justified measure, may seem untimely the decision to direct our attention to the gestures of love, which at first sight seem to be located at the antipodes of all the above. However, our argument will point to showing that between violence and the gesture of love, more than a great distance, there is a thin (though deep) abyss. To start, we must at least make a first sketch of the notion of “gesture of love”. This will allow us to formulate and approach some problems that the gesture of love proposes, both at the level of theory and in the pragmatics of life itself, and this work will make it possible to replace the initial outline with a better finished conception.

## WHAT IS A LOVE GESTURE?

Words of love, love letters and proofs of love are a constellation which love gestures are included. Now, if we have to judge the magnitude of each one of its four stars by the literature produced around them along history, we should concluded that love gestures are the star less important in the group. What’s the reason of this?

A very simple argument could be invoked, capable of closing the question: words, letters and proofs of love are just varieties of love gestures. Consequently, to speak of the first three is to speak of the last and it subsumes them. The proposal is seductive, since the argument seems obvious, but if we review in detail what we usually understand by “gestures of love” we will notice that some of these are neither proofs, nor letters, nor words.

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To prove, it is enough to give a single counterexample, and we find it in the last story of the movie *Relatos salvajes* (Szifron, 2014). Revenge has a major role in the six stories of this film, but the common core of all is indignation: the protagonists enrage because they were not treated with dignity, or they lose the dignity that they believed to have, but in one or the other case they seek, without exception, to recover at least a fragment of the lost dignity. The whole seems destined to show in a thousand ways that outraged dignity never returns without violence and that violence can be angry and lethal. In the last story, Romina and Ariel enjoy their wedding party until she discovers that he had an affair with a guest, and makes him confess. In search of the lost dignity, Romina visits all the boxes of the scheme created by Lacan throughout his tenth seminar, except that of the inhibition; she goes through the impediment, the pregnancy, the emotion, the symptom, the passage to the act, the embarrassment, the acting out and the anguish, and her frantic and exhausting path is traveled, without respite, under the sign of the greatest indignation. She leaves the room devastated, she runs into a stranger and when Ariel finds her in sexual activity with him, she threatens him “I’ll go to bed with anyone, I’ll divulge your miseries and, when you commit suicide, I’ll keep everything” (Szifron, 2014), she returns to the living room, crash her lover against a mirror, proposes that everyone pretend that the party continues, denigrates Ariel, and finally, in shock, breaks down. At that moment, an unexpected turn takes place: seeing her so desolate and dejected, he offers her his hand with dignity, takes her out to dance without saying anything, and ends up making love with her on a table.

Let’s rewind the movie for a few minutes and go back to the moment when Ariel offers her hand to Romina. If that is not a love gesture, the expression “love gesture” does not mean anything. But it turns out that this gesture, which obviously is not a letter, does not consist of words and, although at a certain angle it could be considered a proof of love, including it in this category would entail to force things a lot. Therefore it seems more reasonable to admit that there are love gestures that are neither words, nor letters, nor proofs and that therefore, the love gesture has its own characteristics that distinguish it from these, so the question raised above does not can be closed in advance because it is just trivial. It will be necessary to explore that constellation with greater caution and without prejudice. Doing it in the diacritical dimension, which we have already begun to explore, will not be a bad bet. Let’s continue.

Some love words can be love gestures, although only rarely, and when that happens, it is not due to a peculiarity of those words (that, in general, are banalities and even prayers): the gesture has no essence, but it becomes, and in this case it is produced by the fact of pronouncing certain words on certain occasions. The key is to do something in these, as well as, within the mentioned example, the act of giving the hand to the bride acquires the dignity of the gesture of love for having been made on that occasion. Anyway, we should not exaggerate here the importance of “doing”. In the first place, the love gesture is not a gesture because of its gestures; does not define it as its pantomime character, but the fact that on the occasion of its emergence it is a sign—whose characteristics we will clear later—. Secondly, because the love gesture can gain that value by a “stop doing”, that is, by suspending something that was being done so far, in a similar way to what Bateson observed in a detail of French gestures.

For the rest, although Lacan and Miller have emphasized the importance of differentiating between love words and love letters, similar assessments can be made regarding the relationship between love words and love gestures. Indeed, some love letters can be love gestures, but not all, and although they do not usually reduce to banalities or prayers, the defining thing is not what they say, but what is done with it. This “doing” must have, as in the case of the love word, the value of a specific sign.

The proofs of love have a different character. It has always been considered that, for an act to be a proof of love, it must have a sacrificial side or demand an atypical, sometimes extreme effort, and there is no doubt that there are proofs of love that for that reason are love gestures. However, a proof of love can be heroic and even risky without constituting a true love gesture. This is proved by the feats fantasized or effectively carried out by the obsessive neurotic, masterfully analyzed by Freud in the case of the “Rat Man”. Moreover, such feats can be worth the same cancellation

of the love gesture, in a kind of tenacity that could be summarized in the sentence: “I can do all this for you, but you will never receive a love gesture from me”. In other words, there are proofs of love that, as signs, even have the opposite value to that which is characteristic of love gestures.

In short, this first diacritical exploration shows the convenience of considering the love gesture as a peculiar type of sign, understanding “sign” in the sense defined by Peirce, that is, *something like something to somebody for something*: what for someone represents something. And, because in the particular case of the love gesture, the “someone” is invariably the love *partenaire*, our inquiry should aim to define exactly what that “something” should be so that the “it” be a sign of love.

### OF WHAT IS THE LOVE GESTURE SIGN?

Although the psychoanalytic literature in relation to the subject in question is, besides scarce, quite poor, a fleeting observation of Lacan has sufficient power to serve us hereafter. In the course of his seminar on the logic of the fantasy, Lacan characterizes the love gesture as the production of a brand, and what does this mean, but in (and with) the love gesture something is written or, said with greater precision, ceases not to be written? The latter defines the contingency, which occurs in place (and with the condition) of an impossibility, which never ceases to be written. In this aspect, the love gesture is included, like love itself, in the record of that contingency (singular) that writes the impossible sexual relationship (universal). Because of its character of writing, that is, of the letter that is written, the love gesture presents a surprising affinity with the love letter. In fact, many languages, such as English and French (in the past, also Spanish), condense into a single signifier the senses of “letter” and “letter”.

So far, we have found out that the gesture of love is a contingent writing with the value of a sign that represents something for the *partenaire*. In order to approach the nature of this “something”, it may be useful to first investigate what are the circumstances in which the presence or absence of a love gesture are of crucial importance. The example we have taken from *Relatos Salvajes* can come to help us for the second time, since, without the final love gesture, the bond between the *partenaires*, beaten to the point of exhaustion in the previous moments, would have been irretrievably cut off.

Nothing is further from the exaltation of love, poetic idealization and moral aspirations, than the fight between two *partenaires*. Nothing is less creative than this. It can be triggered by almost anything, a silly thing reaches, but once the red button is pressed, everything goes by ways devoid of originality. The script of the disagreement between two lovers has a few thematic variations, and it is remarkable how easily love can be transmuted into hatred and even into outright aggression. It is evident that, in its course, profound changes take place at the level of *jouissances*. What form does this change have? In the *floue* economy by which the basic *jouissances* can only redistribute, the exacerbation of the phallic *jouissance* (which prevails in the struggles to decide which of the two *partenaires* is right), that of the *jouissance* of meaning (framed and modeled by the meaning fantasmatic) and the drive *jouissance* (which in the fight itself is able to find an autonomous increase) conspire to minimize the *jouissance* of life that feeds the *sinthome* in general and the love relationship in particular. So, this last *jouissance* is the only singular, it is not by chance that every couple's fight is related to the compromise of dignity, to the extent that the link between dignity and indignation is not random and indignation is the feeling that it seizes us on the occasion of an affront to our uniqueness. Hence, its essential relationship with any attack on the love bond, because love is not a relationship between two subjects, but a bond between the subject and what makes it unique, that is, that singularity in which lies its own dignity.

Well, in the final scene of the story of *Relatos Salvajes* that we have already discussed, once reached the point of greatest distance between the *partenaires*, once the moment when the last remnants of the love bond seem ready to jump in pieces, the act of giving a dignified hand to

dignify your partner does nothing but materialize what makes him a gesture of love, namely, the will to restore the threatened bond. That gesture has an eminent value when it comes to ending a couple's fight. To this end, then, it is necessary that the gesture recognizes the dignity of the *partenaire* without compromising his own. In this lies its effectiveness and its difficulty at the same time.

So, to summarize what has been said, that the love gesture shares with the word of love its significant character, with the letter of love its value as a letter, and with the proof of love its sacrificial aspect. What, then, is that "something"? That the love gesture represents for the loved one? Of what is the gesture of love sign? Of a dignification of the correlative love bond of the renunciation of those *jouissances* whose increase diminishes the singular *jouissance* of the *sinthome*.

### WHAT DIFFICULTY DOES THE GESTURE OF LOVE FACE?

This gives new light on our first question: why literature is so scarce relative to love gestures. It is not idle to suppose that this is due, first of all, to the fact that gestures of love proper (that is, those that are not words, letters or proofs of love) are in turn scarce, and that the reason for this shortage lies in the intrinsic difficulty that the realization of a gesture of love entails. What is the difficulty?

To answer this question, it is convenient to pay attention to a non-fortuitous coincidence: the "something" that the gesture of love represents for the *partenaire* is, as we saw, a correlative dignification of the renouncement of *jouissance* whose increase diminishes the singular *jouissance* of the *sinthome*, and on the other hand that same dignification is what is expected as a result of the passage through analytical experience. This means that the production of gestures of love mobilizes everything that hinders the cure: arrogant pride is a destiny of the narcissistic libido that hinders access to dignified positions, just as the *jouissance* of the dispute offers a particular form of resistance of the Id, etc. Ignore the Other and stop speaking to him are, at the same time, the negative of any gesture of love in the couple and the suspension of any transference bond in the analysis. But we must not forget that the renunciation of certain ways of *jouissance* is usually experienced as a symbolic equivalent of castration and therefore is lived with maximum anguish, so that the difficulty to make gestures of love is heir of all forms of defense against the castration anguish.

That is why we said that, between violence and the gesture of love, more than a great distance there is a thin (though deep) abyss. To pass it would not be much if it did not require crossing the worst of anguish. Every gesture of love enunciates an offer to the *partenaire* in act: "I renounce the common *jouissance* for the benefit of the singular *jouissance* that connects me with you". For that reason, the gestures of love that we make, and also those that we stop doing, define us with such precision: both say our singularity.

Undoubtedly, the time in which we lived would not be so populated with violent passions if the gestures of love had more room in it. But, as we now know that, for structural reasons, it is more difficult to produce them than to avoid them, we must accept that this aspiration is nothing more than a utopia. In spite of this, the course of an analysis can be thought of as a sum of movements of dignification, each of which is equivalent, by its intrinsic coordinates, to a gesture of love. And, although the analytical discourse might lose, it is worthwhile to fight against abjection.

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