

# Powers of Love Editorial

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The visual language for a conference on love that recognises the continuum between enchantment and disaffection requires motifs that are neither immediately identifiable as the semiotics of commercialised love nor representational. The (re)constructions and deconstructions of love as a set of kinetic processes that simultaneously revitalise while having the capacity to destroy as a non-binary force is well-served by the drawings created by Jamie Hudson.



Figure 1. Jamie Hudson drawings, 2022–23

Hudson’s fuchsia marks evoke passion, excitement, assurance and liveness associated with their intense hue and take inspiration from various traditions of love knots that signify lovers’ entanglement. However, these drawings show its unravelling, with pieces and strands that are left disentangled, unknotted from their binding yet connected, entwined in places. They form part of the poster artwork for the *Powers of Love* conference and capture the myriad strands of dissatisfaction with love as an experience and as an idea, but also the potentially of love to be socially and politically transformative. The knots further connect with the theme of the 2021 PARSE conference, *Violence*. The two conference themes of love and violence were not conceived in parallel, but they remained difficult to separate from the start. Here knots of love and knots of violence intimately intertwine. The conference on love was an opportunity to work through the constant entangling and detangling of violence justified in the name of love and freedom, and the potency of love as enchantment.

The multiplicity of the conference contributions selected for this *PARSE Journal* issue are published in two places on the PARSE website. One comprises the plenary contributions by invited artists, researchers and scholars who shared their practices through various modes of presentation.<sup>[1]</sup> The second appears here and is developed from presentations originally made at the 2023 conference in Gothenburg.

Mara Lee’s performative lecture “[Affective Rebellions of the Imaginary](#)” produced a fantastical atmosphere in which “dream and desire open up for affective dynamics”, where the ability for “love to produce emancipation

and equality” is questioned together with the feminist critique of love as commodified and affecting creativity. In a demonstration-performance Jamie J. Philbert and Rondel Benjamin invited participants through call and response, dance and drumming to experience the sacred combat ritual of Kalinda from Trinidad and Tobago. “Tête-à-Tête: Kalinda is Love” reveals the “transformability of performance through ritual war dances, erotic play, games, [and the] celebration of life and death which initiates experiences that shatter boundaries of being.”

Through an interrogative questioning of opera and its long tradition of grappling with questions of love in intimate relationships, Chaya Czernowin’s “Heart Chamber, an Inquiry of Love / an Inquiry of Trust” drew from her own operatic composition *Heart Chamber*. It explores the “smallest physical and psychic changes that push two strangers to get towards and away from each other as they embark on a transformative path.” Czernowin shows how expanding the operatic form provides alternative ways to reflect on contemporary preoccupations of love that are more intrinsically connected to issues of trust. Remaining with the sonic as a mode of expression, Zara Julius’s “Archives in Stereo” stages a playlist and describes her engagement with “the ‘ethnographic object’ that takes seriously the internal logic of looted objects from Africa and the African diaspora.” Her “methodology of ‘rapture’ takes a funerary logic around our responsibilities of grief and interment” to provide the lens from which to review “the settler (post) colony”.

Visual artists Kim Anno and Ingela Johansson each provide an in-depth survey of their respective practices and show how geographic and political specificities in their respective works are intricately connected to community. Kim Anno’s “In the House of Humanity, Catastrophe and Ecstasy Hold Hands” poses a series of questions through the geographic locations of her practice, which include San Francisco, Johannesburg and Cuba (among others). Anno observes: “How can I feel love inside myself despite the chaos swirling around outside a body?” The external circumstances that Anno explores in her art practice connects the plight of communities to environmental and ecological challenges, the paucity of political solidarities and the disillusionment of young people. Her work strives to reconcile divides and aims to revive hope among the youth she engages with in her practice. Ingela Johansson’s presentation, “I don’t want to become robotic to push the limits, withdraw and sense with your heart”, provides a comprehensive survey of her work that interweaves film, textile and installation to reflect on the histories of communities and labour in Sweden. Her work “bridges stories from archives that echo past lives” while foregrounding ethics and questioning “what it means to push the limits for oneself and recuperate a focus on care for oneself and others.”

Present online at the conference, but absent from the plenary recordings, was Hiroshi Ishiguro whose captivating research on robotics (android technology) in Japan posed the question of the “possibility of robots having hearts and love.” The talk focused on the social demands for the development of this technology with Japan’s ageing population. But it raised important philosophical and ethical concerns around the nature of love and the definition of “heart” based on research and development in robotics and cognitive science. A future of human-android relations in Ishiguro’s pronouncement is a *fait accompli*. The dilemma he leaves us with is one of how humans might survive each other’s wrath in spite of themselves, and even more provocative how androids might potentially be the means to return us to our humanity.

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Jack London’s first-person science fiction novel *The Star Rover* (1915) recounts university professor Darrell Standing’s experience of life imprisonment for murder in San Quentin State Prison. Tightly laced inside a canvas jacket intended to torture, Standing wills himself into trances that allow his mind to time travel. The violence of his incarceration, which London acknowledged was based on interviews with an inmate, leads the bulk of the

novel into the places where Standing takes his mind during these feats of gross endurance. Here he arguably enters the terrain of the power of love and its intertwining with violence.

Sabine Dahl recognises “conviviality as a friction-filled form of being-in-common”, concluding that “love and agonism are not necessarily perceived as being mutually exclusive.” Johanne Løgstrup and Winnie Sze write about the so-called Mancoba textile proposed to be the collaborative output of the married couple Ernest Mancoba and Sonja Ferlov Mancoba, who existed with their son as an unusually enduring family unit, while personally and professionally experiencing racism and ostracisation. As John-Paul Zaccarini’s script from his performance lecture at the conference warns, “Our skins are an interface with a gaze that does not comprehend the violence it can perform, and often in the sheep’s clothing of love.”

Trussed in his straitjacket, London’s protagonist withstands these contradictions when he dreams and dreams vividly of alternative worlds. Alongside love, the potential of violence remains ever-present. Among the many worlds experienced by Standing is a precarious cliff rescue by fishermen “clad entirely in dirt white, with their long hair done up in a curious knot on their pates the marriage knot, as I was afterward to learn, and also, a handy thing to clutch hold of with one hand whilst you clouted with the other when an argument went beyond words.”<sup>[2]</sup> For London’s character, gratitude and enmity co-exist. As Erin Cory reflects, in a co-authored text with Michaela Domiano, Laleh Foroughanfar, Conor McLaughlin and Pille Prulmann-Vengerfeldt, their workshops invite researchers to write love letters as an alternative to the systemic violence of traditional ethnographic studies. Cory concludes, “How does one hold affection and love alongside politics and history?”

Feats of imagination that search for alternative futures resonate throughout this issue. Assunta Ruocco’s intimate discussion of her durational artwork *Our Days of Gold* considers a project initiated on the first anniversary of her mother’s sudden death evoking a nostalgic time travel that keeps her mother’s memory vivid, while marking the ever-increasing span of time since the date of her death. Speaking of their collaborative film, Nobunye Levin and Palesa Nomanzi Shongwe, offer “In *Reverie*, we spoke of what you described as the capitalist, racist and hetero-patriarchal ‘dream machine’ of the Hollywood industrial mode. We have refused its presumptions of what will kill us, how we will die, how we shall be resurrected and what to dream for and of.” Levin concludes, “To dream is serious work.”

While violence is a frequent sub-text of this journal issue, it is far from exclusive. As part of her ongoing working theory of threshold ethics, Cathryn Klasto embarks on a relationship with a generative AI chatbot partner that may say as much about the very real love of her human partner as it does about AI. Victoria Karlsson writes of queer listening “just like love, queer listening also offers no place of safety.” Instead she invites us “despite all the risks of dangerous and unruly (queer) sounds, [to] take our cue from [bell] hooks, and learn to approach listening as a radical queer act of openness, generosity and love.” Colleagues Melina Bigale, Anders Carlsson, Ida von Schmalensee, Litó Walkey and Ingeborg Zackariassen’s reflection on their workshop seeks to “form an artistic community that functions without or against hierarchy” recognising that crucial to this endeavour is the difficult task that “one should be fully present and invested in the process.”

Mark Tatlow too reflects on the value of being entirely present during his daily woodland walks, while considering the potential of enchantment for both the performer but also the listener in composer Arvo Pärt’s *The Deer’s Cry*. Maria Bania devotes her attention to the early Romantic ideal of “the performer who understands and resonates with the music” to such an extent that they “can identify with the composer’s self”. And finally, artist Kim Anno describes her sense of living with “one foot in tragedy and one in ecstasy, disassociated from the end of the narrative, and unmoored by circumstances.” Anno asks, “How many times do we find ourselves avoiding

suffering?”

In their own ways, these contributors enact versions of mind and body travel. Without denying the violence that has engulfed our contemporary times, they each experiment with forms of love that may ultimately contribute to our collective survival.

## Footnotes

1. All plenary presentations are documented and available on the audio-video function of the PARSE site, except for the plenary discussion by Professor Hiroshi Ishiguro, which was facilitated by Yuka Oyama and Cathryn Klasto, but was not recorded upon request of the speaker.
2. London, Jack. *The Star Rover*. [1915]. E-book Loc 2025.