

Thinking(,)Love: On Jean-Luc Nancy and Alain Badiou

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Love, as generally conceived, erects insuperable walls against the cold interrogations of philosophical thought. Hospitable to the poet, priest, and psychoanalyst, love denies entry to the philosopher who remains unable to advance beyond the barriers that love constructs. The philosopher is then left with a few options, among them: to proclaim that love is illusory, to insist that it is a problem that philosophy is unable to surmount, or to translate what the poet, priest, or psychoanalyst says in his own idiom, granting their pronouncements a modicum of philosophical dignity sans the rigor of philosophical thought. Love is thus somewhat of an embarrassment for philosophy. Confused and tongue-tied, do not philosophers exhibit symptoms associated with the love-struck every time they speak of love?

The poverty in the thinking of love, as philosopher Jean-Luc-Nancy rightly observes, stems from the problem of exhaustion (245); exhaustion in at least two senses: first, we have run out of new and meaningful things to say about love and second, we are getting tired of making old ideas seem novel, of pouring old wine into new bottles, so to speak. This exhaustion in thought is undergirded by the universal consensus that love is that which lies beyond the domain of the thinkable. As dominantly conceived, it is simply ungraspable intensity that cannot be held down by the restrictive grip of any theory. Paradoxically, it is the metaphorical language of poetry and art—"in the musical ejaculation of novelistic subtleties"—that provides the most "direct" method to render love somewhat accessible to thought (Badiou, *Scene of Two*). According to philosopher Alain Badiou, this anti-philosophical position installs the thinking of love within the "multiplicity of language games" where it is oriented toward infinite description that is perpetually subject to the shifting and unstable laws of the linguistic universe rather than oriented toward the production of truth ("Philosophy and Desire" 35). Indeed, it is a way of thinking love that begets exhaustion by being circuitously inexhaustible.

Love and thinking thus make for strange bedfellows, and trite as this may sound, it has nevertheless become a sedimented idea that even the most eminent theorists feel the need to challenge. When Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue for the need to reconceptualize love within political theory in *Commonwealth*, they felt it

necessary to make a preemptive strike against skeptics: "Yes, we know [love] makes many readers uncomfortable. Some squirm in their seats with embarrassment and others smirk with superiority" (179). In *Finite Thinking*, Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of the intellectual paralysis that occurs when one attempts to philosophize about love: "Has not the impossibility of speaking about love been...violently recognized....We know the words of love to be inexhaustible, but as to speaking *about* love, could we perhaps be exhausted?" (245). The challenge posed by these thinkers then is how to think of the relationship of love and knowledge that does not lead to either embarrassment or exhaustion.

It is difficult to determine what the ambitious project of rethinking love entails? Does it entail purifying love from various conceptual contaminations?¹ Or, does it entail a Foucauldian search for a pre-lapsarian moment in history before love was shamelessly co-opted by the prevailing epistemic regime? Drawing primarily from the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and Alain Badiou, I suggest that to rethink love has to begin with thinking about the relationship of love and thought, for it is an occasion that obligates one to realize the "intimate connivance between love and thinking", to use the words of Jean-Luc Nancy (247). Thought is undergirded by love, and love is undergirded by thought. The degree of this "intimate connivance," for Nancy, means that thinking itself is love. For Nancy as well as for Badiou love is not cheap sentimentality. It is not an emotion, passion, nor is it an affect. It is not an ideological illusion that colludes with the dominant bourgeois morality and conceals the logic of advanced capitalism that covertly structures modern relationship (as some radical theorists accused it to be). It is, rather, a condition of thinking.

Jean-Luc Nancy and Alain Badiou inhabit almost incompatible domains of thought; yet, quite interestingly their thought productively intersect when it comes to the idea of communism and of love. They see both as an exigency for the future of thought. For both Badiou and Nancy the importance of communism and of love remains something to come. Yet, whereas the two are rather prolific on the topic of communism their reflections on love seem to be more tentative rather than sustained. Even Badiou's book-length work *Love is a Modest 104 Pages*, and is uncharacteristically informal, impressionistic, and anecdotal. Consequently, my own work follows the ponderous pace of their thought. It should be noted that in proposing "a new style of philosophy", Badiou argues that thinking "requires leisureliness and not speed" (*Infinite* 58). It has to be, in a way, off beat with the mad dance of capitalism:

Our world is marked by speed: the speed of historical change; the speed of technical change; the speed of communications; of transmissions; and even the speed in which human beings establish connections with one another...Speed is the mask of inconsistency. Philosophy must propose a retardation process (*Infinite Thought* 51).

Thinking then must proceed at a tempo that would allow it to properly unfold. It should not be limited to producing knowledge about the structure of the situation (and thus synchronized with the pulse of world); rather, it should prepare us to "receive

and accept the drama of the Event without anxiety,” and is “open to the irreducible singularity of what happens...fed and nourished by the surprise of the unexpected” (55-56). Perhaps the surprise of an unexpected occurrence of love.

Love and Thought's Intimate Connivance: Jean-Luc Nancy on Love

So, what is the relation of love and thought?

Jean-Luc Nancy says that to ask that question is to encounter a profound silence. Nancy writes that it is a question that “asks for extreme reticence as soon as it is solicited” (245). Such reticence suggests that either love cannot or will not offer itself up to the cold calculations of thought, or that we have exhausted what could be said about love. Nancy, however, suggests that the silence that confronts us when we attempt to think love does not signal the poverty of thought. It is not an indicator of intellectual vacuity. In fact, this silence is a result of generosity, “the generosity not to choose between loves, not to privilege, not to hierarchize, not to exclude”. The reticence that emerges in the thinking of love is, therefore, not exclusive to love but to any form of thinking worthy of the name. For thought “essentially takes place in the reticence that lets singular moments of experience offer and arrange themselves”. For Nancy, all thinking is undergirded by love, and love “does not call for a certain kind of thinking, or for a thinking of love...because thinking most properly speaking, is love” (247). Not to say that love is identical to thinking; rather, love and thinking do not live separate and self-contained lives.

So, now we might ask: if thinking begins with love, when does love begin? For Nancy (and for Badiou as well, but more on this to come), love begins with the utterance of “I love you”. If love were an affect, its legibility within the socio-symbolic would carry little weight in confirming its existence; however, for Nancy, what is most vital in love is contained within its declaration: “All of love resides in the fact of saying “I love you” to someone....In a certain sense, “I love you” says it all; everything is contained in “I love you” (2011: 66). For Nancy, this declaration initiates the movement of love, which for him is a dialectical process.

By being thought according to the dialectic and as the essence of the dialectic, love is assigned to the very heart of the movement of being...If one may say so—and one may rightly, in the most accurate and most proper manner—love is the heart of this dialectic...Love is at the heart of being (251).

Nancy, with hesitation, defines love as “extreme movement, beyond the self, of a being reaching completion” (249). However, with love being the “heart of the dialectic” contradictions become sites of exposure and openness rather than resolved by sublation: “The heart exposes the subject. It does not deny it, it does not surpass it, it is not sublated or sublimated in it; the heart exposes the subject to everything to everything that is not its dialectic and its mastery as a subject” (254). To utter “I love you”, to inscribe the existence of love in the domain of the socio-symbolic, marks the genesis of an “extreme movement” of a “being reaching completion” which does not involve sublation of the self or other; rather, the self is exposed, “but what is exposed,

what makes it exposed, is that it is not completed by this process, and it *incompletes itself* to the outside...” (253).

Deviating from standard presentations of love as fusional, Nancy posits that love initiates a cutting, an incision, a fissure. Love shatters self and other, and in this mutual gesture of opening up, an amorous relation (rapport) is formed: “he, this subject, was touched, broken into, in his subjectivity, and he is from then on, from the time of love, opened by this slice, broken or fractured, even if only slightly . . . From then on, *I is constituted broken*” (261). It is challenging to establish conceptual consistency in Nancy’s use of metaphors, which, at first blush, even seems contradictory. Touching and caressing are not gestures that one would immediately associate with fracturing and shattering. But what I think Nancy is attempting to demonstrate is the extreme fragility of any supposed self-enclosed and total subject or idea. Love undermines the tendency of thinking to totalize, classify, hierarchize. To touch, to caress are gestures that suggests contact, relation, but not possession nor domination. In English we would say “fully grasp an idea.” In Tagalog (Filipino) we use the word *kuha* (meaning to possess but also to grab) to speak of the mastery of an idea or thought. Nancy thus not only defines the relevance of love to thought (which for him are locked in a mutual embrace), but also suggests a way to conceptualize thought itself as non-immediate and non-totalizing. He enacts this approach to thinking and love in his own writing, which appears impressionistic, tentative yet at the same time urgent and carefully considered. In reading “Shattered Love”, one is touched by the work, and one only touches it too, never fully grasping it. Commenting on the impact of “Shattered Love”, Avital Ronnell writes:

It has changed lives, it has devastated, it has created ecstatic recognitions and dis-identifications, break-ups, new fusions and so on, multiplied the whole notion of a possible couple and given different modalities of loving and love...It somehow inscribed itself inside me somewhere.”

Although she uses the word “inscribe”, one might say that the text has “touched” Ronnell. It has shattered her understanding of love, and it the same gesture offered her new possibilities of thinking (about love).

Nancy’s contribution to the thinking of love also brackets out concepts of attachment, obsession, and desire. For Nancy, desire is “foreign to love”...[it is] “infelicitous love”...[It] lacks its object...and lacks it while appropriating it to itself (or rather, it appropriates it to itself while lacking it)...[It] is unhappiness without end...” (263). Love is not constructed out of libidinal matter that comes from within the subject; rather, love comes from the outside:

It does not pass through the outside because it comes from it... Love does not stop, as long as love lasts, coming from the outside. It does not remain outside; it is this outside itself, the other, each time singular, a blade thrust in me, and that I do not rejoin, because it disjoins me (261).

The declaration of love, if uttered sincerely, is a moment of realization that one is open, shattered, exposed. The moment of being touched, fissured, shattered by love, and

exposed to the other, is a crucial moment for thought for it makes possible the communication of *sense* (sens). For Nancy, most forms of communication are moments when rationality merely thinks itself and when a subject converses with itself (despite seeming that he or she is conversing with another). What we often consider to communication between two subjects is really just a dialogue of one: in speaking to you, I speak to myself, and in hearing you I hear myself. Love shatters this echo chamber making it possible to communicate *sense*, a dialogue that occurs “across the absolute incommensurability of speaking positions” (Morin 40).

Given the absolute disjunction between singularities, how do we establish genuine relations with another? Nancy suggests that it is certainly not to place oneself within the “desire of the other” by positioning a total and unified presentation of the self within the other’s field of desire (an unconscious tendency that made Jacques Lacan posit the impossibility of sexual relations). It is rather through love, which opens and exposes singularities to themselves and each other.

I Matheme You: Alain Badiou and the Axiomatics of Love

Similar to Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou sees love as emerging from the gap between two singularities. He challenges the dominant tendency to think of love as attempting to erase that disjunction, suggesting that it is precisely this tendency that is responsible for the poverty in the thinking of love. Badiou like Nancy insists that love and thought occupy the same conceptual space, and in fact ends his meditation on love in his important essay “The Scene of Two” by writing, “I am pleased to conclude that to love is to think” (*Conditions* 261). Badiou arrives at his conclusions through the highly formal process of an “axiomatics of love,” which he formulates on the basis of nothing but an “essential conviction” (182). He posits that it is folly to proceed with an analysis of love using “psychology or a theory of passions,” for the “experience of the loving subject... does not constitute any knowledge of love”; “love does not think itself” (182). He invites us to imagine love subtracted of the things one is predisposed to spontaneously associate with it, for only when those distractions are jettisoned can a highly formal analysis of love properly take place. For Badiou, logic is the best remedy for the exhaustion that afflicts the thinking of love, arguing that “No theme requires more pure logic than love.” Such a scandalous claim is, unsurprisingly, an open invitation for misunderstanding and ridicule. Indeed, one of his critics, a French broadcaster, found it disconcerting that he “would associate austere formulas with the marvelous experience of love”, and joked that Badiou abandons “*je t’aime*” (I love you) in favor of “*je te matheme*” (I matheme you)—a dismissive yet amusing pun whose rhetorical power works best on the airwaves where nuance rarely resides. The Romantic legacy had effectively welded passion, emotion, and sentimentality to the amorous experience; yet, Badiou argues that to pursue a philosophical inquiry of love the “pathos of passion, of error, of jealousy, of sex, and of death... must be held at a distance” (183). When Badiou posits that the analysis of love requires pure logic, he invites us to think of love not in terms of affect, emotions, or passions, but via axioms.

Badiou’s argument that logic is the most productive method of thinking love is not merely an attempt to shock and provoke. For Badiou, to think love anew requires a complete break from established and sedimented knowledge. Logic cannot simply be supplemented to existing frameworks. There must first be a conceptual clearing. Thus, his philosophy of love begins with an enumeration and nonnegotiable rejections. In particular, he rejects “the fusional conception of love” (for love cannot be a procedure that suppresses the multiple in favor of a One), “the ablative concept of love” (for love is not an experience of the Other but an experience of the world/situation), and “the superstructural or illusory conception of love” (for love is not just an ornament to make smooth the clumsy procedure of sexual relations). The conceptual origins of the first two definitions could be traced back to Romantic theories of love, while the third definition echoes Schopenhauer’s philosophy that conceives of love as something manufactured by nature’s will-to-live (“What is Love?” 181). For Badiou, love has to be a “production of truth,” and all the aforementioned definitions of love sacrifice the production of truth in favor of the rule of the One: the “fusional” conception of love seeks to make a One out of Two; the “ablative,” though attempting to produce an authentic knowledge of the Other, is only able to apprehend the Other as an object (*objet a*) within the coordinates of the subject’s own fantasy (and thus is also caught in the logic of the One); and the “illusory,” makes love a mere pawn in sexuality’s regime.

Through his rejections Badiou enacts a conceptual clearing that opens up a space of thought for his very formal and logical approach to love. Liberated thus from thinking of love within those frameworks, Badiou proposes to begin not with feeling but with counting. Love for him is the construction of the amorous situation that he calls the “Scene of Two”: One and another One, an immanent Two. To be clear, Badiou distinguishes the Two from the couple. Whereas the two subjects that constitute the scene of Two retain their disjunction the couple is a phenomenal appearance visible to a third position that counts the Two as One. The Two is not the combination of ‘one’ and ‘one’ but rather is an immanent Two, a “process” which signals that “there is one position and another position... totally disjunct from the other” (“What is Love?” 187).

Love, Badiou claims, begins with an encounter, a haphazard meeting of pure contingency. It is the amorous encounter that marks the fortuitous moment when the life of one human being randomly intersects with another human being, transforming them both into authentic Subjects (to truth); that is, as authentic agents with the potential for action that is not manipulated by larger structures of power and control. For Badiou, the encounter is “the name of the amorous chance, inasmuch as it initiates the supplement” (“Scene of Two”). By referring to love as a “supplement” Badiou is underscoring his claim that love is not something that belongs to a situation, but something that comes from “outside” it; it is not an element recognized as belonging to a preexisting structure. This properly foreign element opens up possibilities for the amorous subjects of seeing the world anew, from the perspective of the Two instead of from the One. Badiou, in one of his more poetic moments, writes:

When I lean on the shoulder of the woman I love, and can see, let's say, the peace of twilight over a mountain landscape, gold-green fields, the shadow of trees, black-nosed sheep motionless behind hedges and the sun about to disappear behind craggy peaks, and know—not from the expression of her face, but from within the world as it is—that the woman I love is seeing the same world, and that this convergence is part of the world and that love constitutes precisely, at that very moment, the paradox of an identical difference, then love exists, and promises to continue to exist. The fact is she and I are now incorporated into this unique Subject, the Subject of love that views that panorama of the world through the prism of our difference, so this world can be conceived, be born, and not simply represent what fills my own individual gaze (*In Praise* 25).

It is instructive to underscore the ancillary comment “not from the expression of her face, but from within the world”. Badiou hints that we should resist thinking of love within a Levinasian framework; that is, as an ethical relation initiated by the phenomenological encounter with the face that binds the subject to a pre-ontological and infinite responsibility to the other. Rather, love should be properly conceived as an “experience of the world, or of the situation, under the post-evental condition that there were Two” (“What is Love?” 187).

Badiou arrives at this unique understanding of love through the highly formal process of his “axiomatics of love,” which he formulates on the basis of nothing but an “essential conviction” (“What is Love” 182). In “What is Love?” Badiou begins by providing three preliminary axioms: (1) “There are two positions of the experience of love” (Man and Woman); (2) “The two positions are totally disjunct”; and (3) “There is no third position” (“What is Love” 183). It is instructive to point out that there is a clear homology between his “axioms” and Lacan’s theories on the relation (or lack thereof) of the two sexualized positions. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory similarly claims that there are two sexualized positions designated as “Man” and “Woman.” These two positions are purely symbolic and have no biological, empirical, or social basis, but are so termed depending on the subject’s relation to the phallic signifier (of wanting *to have* or *to be* the phallus). Those two positions constitute two wholly separate realms of experience, and no real connection between the two positions can be successfully established. This is because the laws of the Symbolic and the deceptive images of the Imaginary always mediate sexual relations; thus, subjects cannot transcend the perimeters defined by their respective fantasies (Hence, Lacan’s famous pronouncement: “There is no sexual relation” [*Encore* 6]). However, although Badiou accepts the Lacanian thesis that the two positions are *absolutely* disjunct, he rejects the conventional reading of Lacan when it comes to the role of love in addressing the disjunction. Numerous Lacanian commentators have interpreted Lacan’s famous “Love is that which comes to *supplement* for the lack of a real connection” to mean that love is merely this illusion that functions to make amorous subjects misrecognize their fundamental non-connection. Badiou unpacks Lacan’s formula by first

interrogating—à la Derrida but certainly a repetition with a difference—the function of the supplement. He argues that if one accepts the thesis that the two sexualized positions are separated by a non-rapport then this non-rapport *cannot* be written, and if it cannot be written, “if it is non-existent as an effect of a structure,” it follows that “love itself as supplement can only arrive by chance” (“Scene of Two”). This absolute contingency is crucial in Badiou’s project to re-think “love” as a truth-procedure. Love, therefore, is not a relation (in fact, it is born precisely at the point of non-relation), but is a *process* that is “the advent of the Two as such, the scene of Two.” Love is the “hypothetical operator” of the accidental collision of two trajectories that is the “event-encounter” (“What is Love” 188).

“There is no third position,” Badiou’s third axiom, has to do with “the announcement of the disjunction” (“What is Love” 184). The “announcement of the disjunction” cannot be done from the vantage point of a third position because it will necessarily entail the activation of an external law of count, a totalizing gesture governed by the “rule of One.” But what kind of interpreting intervention then is necessary to render love discernible within a socio-symbolic system? How can love be inscribed in a Situation as a “Scene of Two” if no position is available from which that love can be witnessed? Badiou posits that love is “fixed only through a naming, and this naming constitutes a declaration, the declaration of love” (188). For Badiou, this declaration puts in circulation within the Situation the truth of the gap that separates the two sexualized positions: “A Two that proceeds amorously is specifically the name of the disjunct as apprehended in its disjunction” (189). And in this gesture of amorous nomination, the truth of the love-event necessarily marks itself onto the bodies of the subjects of love.

However, Badiou’s objective is not simply to assert the fundamental disjunction of the sexes, but also to locate the site of a transpositional truth that does not fall within the two positions—that is, a “truth” that is not limited to being exclusively located within the masculine or feminine positions. Thus, Badiou’s fourth axiom: “There is only one humanity.” Badiou makes it clear, however, that he wants the concept subtracted of its humanist associations. He defines humanity as “that which provides support to the generic or truth procedures... [It] is the historical body of truths” (“What is Love” 184). He derives the existence of a humanity through the rather self-proving logic that if (noumenal) beings could be subjectivized (made into subjects by a generic procedure) then it “attests that the humanity function exists” (184). Note that Badiou establishes the existence of a singular humanity not by enumerating positive characteristics that transcend the sexual disjunction but by the very process of subjectivization itself. For Badiou, although the “humanity function” is shared by the Two positions it cannot be an object of knowledge. It is “present” but not presented, a “subtraction.” Badiou’s fourth axiom thought in conjunction with the first three creates a paradox that is precisely what love as a form of thinking seeks to address. The first three axioms suggest that truths are sexuated while the fourth axiom suggests that love is truly a *generic* procedure for it addresses only one humanity (and not a

specific sexualized position). If the two positions, M and W, are absolutely disjunct then it seems to follow that truths are sexualized as well (read: there exists a masculine and feminine art/ politics/ love/ science). This is the kind of division that someone like, say, Luce Irigaray might endorse (Hallward 189). How then can Truths be transpositional given this fundamental disjunction? Badiou's response: Love is precisely a process that thinks through this paradox. "Love does not relieve that paradox; it treats it" ("What is Love" 186). Love then is itself the paradox that it treats.

Reading Literature with Badiou

If what Badiou has to say about love *feels* insufficient it is probably because his discussion is more concerned with providing a formal structure of love rather than what that structure might contain. Indeed, for such a method of approaching the topic of love, Terry Eagleton says: "Badiou speaks of love as though it is a self-evident experience, which may be true for Parisians but not for the rest of us" (*Figures* 252). Peter Hallward comments that it "comes as no surprise that Badiou has had less to say...about love than about the other generic procedures," for in "the case of love...such truth is private by definition" (185). Also, since love is, for Badiou, fundamentally the "truth of the disjunction" it cannot be an object of knowledge: "the experience of the loving subject...does not constitute any knowledge of love" (*Conditions* 182).

It is my conviction—in the spirit of Badiou, who often justifies claims via the force of conviction—that literature may provide clarificatory material to the very formal procedure of love that Badiou outlines. It is by sheer chance that I came upon the passage that I am going to analyze, and I have the randomness of Google to thank.² The passage is from Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* (1989). I think it beautifully articulates, both as content and as "subtraction", Badiou's ideas on love.

Have you ever been in love? Horrible isn't it? It makes you so vulnerable. It opens your chest and it opens up your heart and it means that someone can get inside you and mess you up. You build up all these defenses, you build up a whole suit of armor, so that nothing can hurt you, then one stupid person, no different from any other stupid person, wanders into your stupid life...They did something dumb one day like kiss you or smile at you and then your life isn't your own anymore. Love takes hostages. (Gaiman)

What one immediately notices in the passage is that although it speaks of love there is nothing specifically said about the loved object. No idealization occurs. In fact, we are given almost nothing about the loved object aside from the fact that "she" is a "stupid person, no different from any other stupid person."³ A word of caution: "stupid" here is not to be understood as idiotic (although it could partially carry that meaning), for then it would simply operate as a regulative marker within the order of being, a way to classify and categorize elements in a Situation. Rather, "stupid" in this context suggests a person subtracted of any accidental feature or characteristic where desire could attach itself, a person in "her" stupid reality, as opposed to "her" tolerable (yet barred, in the Lacanian sense of the term) Symbolic identity. Subtracted of those

accidental features to which desire aims, what remains is the other in his or her stupid reality. Love does not erase the problem of sexual difference; rather, it is testament to the truth of the absolute disjunction of the amorous Two.

Note also that the passage distinguishes between love and desire—that is, love does not have the *objet a*, the object of desire as its cause—while also resisting presenting love as a way of manufacturing an intimate knowledge of the other. Badiou insists that love is not an experience of the other, but an experience of the situation "under the post-evental condition that there were Two" (*Conditions* 182). Consequently, it leaves the reader with a sense that love is precisely the absence of a relation, and calls attention to the fundamental gap that separates the amorous subjects. Further, note how the object of love just "wanders" into one's existence, unanticipated and unexpected. Gaiman represents love as a chance encounter! Its appearance cannot be predicted or calculated within the order of Being, for it is a "disruptive occurrence" (*Infinite* 20).

It also is important to highlight the aleatory nature of the encounter to fully appreciate Badiou's contribution to the thinking of love. The passage states that the amorous other just haphazardly "wanders" into one's life. Love is not *represented* as a choice but as, to use Žižek's phrase, "a forced choice."⁴ Also, is not the mention of erecting "defenses" and donning a "suit of armour" an allusion to the operations of the State of the Situation? The State bars the "phantom remainder" from haunting the Situation so that humans *counted as One* of its elements may harbor illusions of security at the expense of their immortality, their relation to the infinite. Gaiman's passage beautifully and clearly renders Badiou's ontological Faustian bargain.

The prior relationship between two beings as designated by the structure of a particular (ordered) situation (defined by terms such as co-workers, classmates, neighbors, friends, strangers, etcetera) will have no bearing on the love that, upon their declaration, will confer to them both the status of subject. Love, for Badiou, creates new worlds! Long time friends and perfect strangers are both equally suitable candidates to become subjects of love (for as a "generic procedure" love is open to all!). What matters is that the Two recognize the sudden emergence of the amorous event, and that they courageously declare its existence. The declaration makes love legible within the order of being, and its presence is what grants the amorous Two agency, making them proper subjects. To act out of love means that the subject is not acting from the position of the One (which the state of the situation designates), but from the perspective of the Two. Needless to say, the emphasis on the contingency of the amorous encounter makes this passage an apt *representation* of Badiou's understanding of love (I put emphasis on "representation" to indicate that this literary fragment is not consubstantial with an Event—in the way that, say, for Badiou, the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé constitutes an Event in the domain of Art—but rather only a symbolic enactment of it, a mere scene of *re*-presentation).

At this point, allow me to introduce a possible complication. The mention of "opening up", "tak[ing] hostages", and "smile" (metonymically, the face) alludes to a Levinasian vocabulary. I suggest that it would be a mistake to read this passage as an

articulation of Levinasian ethics. The encounter dramatized here is not an encounter with the “face of the other” that binds the subject to a pre-ontological and infinite responsibility towards it. The speaker, as I have mentioned above, does not directly talk about the other (if anything, the speaker alludes to their fundamental disconnection), but rather, talks about love itself. The speaker suggests a responsibility, albeit hesitant, to the amorous-Event rather than a responsibility to the loved object. This responsibility towards the amorous encounter is nothing more than the fidelity to the Event. Suffice it to recall Badiou’s attempt to “preserve the word *ethics*” by reconfiguring it as an “ethic of truth,” a tenacious relation to Truth wherein you “do all you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance” (*Ethics* 47).

A conclusion without concluding, or why parting is such sweet sorrow

I have always thought that writing about love is a lot like falling in love. It consumes your waking days and nights. The experience is full of excitement, possibility, promise, awe, even desire. You begin to find it in every corner of your life: it greets you “Good morning;” accompanies you to lunch; finds its way into daily conversation (make sure to be in the company of very patient ears). It does not seem to need rest for it waltzes into your dreams, a witness to Oedipal screenings (love after all is said to be a creature of the night). It takes its time (and thus this paper was submitted two weeks after the agreed deadline). And it has a weird way of making you enjoy those moments when it is frustratingly demanding, cryptic, uncooperative. The wonderful feeling of amorous pain and anxiety!

But like a lover who always feels that his labours of love are inadequate to show his beloved the depths of his feelings, I feel that this paper is incomplete and insufficient, and in many ways it truly is. Passionate ebbs and flows: there are as many ambitious moments as there are uninspiring ones, as many creative explosions as there are duds. There are “flashes, formulas, surprises of expression” that make my heart swell with pride and joy and love; and to which I have an inexplicable passionate attachment—a way an idea is phrased, the way a sentence flows, the way a paragraph develops a thought. But there are moments of bland explication and uninspired imbecility that make my superego say in sadistic glee: “Is this the best you’ve got?!”

What I have attempted to show in these pages is that both Jean-Luc Nancy and Alain Badiou suggest that the gap between two singularities where love emerges, the domain of so much joy, pleasure, pain and anxiety is also a domain of thought. It should not mandate the banishment of thought, but rather open up possibilities for its future. But I make these claims without presumption. I turn to Nancy and Badiou to make my argument, but I do so opportunistically, because I perhaps recognize my own experience in their words (or perhaps I superimpose my own experience on their words). For better or worse, this paper will inevitably contain my own stories of love: intimate expressions masquerading as general theory. My only hope is that perhaps you will find fragments of your own love stories in these pages.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 For example, Michael Hardt suggests that love needs to be cleansed of its Oedipal content, while Alain Badiou suggests that love has to be reconceptualized without the concepts of fusion and ablation.
- i) The Gaiman passage came up when I searched for “quotes on love” using Google. Why did I search love on Google? For purely scholarly reasons, I assure you. Of course, needless to say, I do not speak for my unconscious.
- ii) I use scare quotes on “she” (and on “her” in the rest of the explication of the passage) to indicate that the loved object occupies the position W and does not necessarily indicate a biological or social reality.
- iii) In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek writes: “The paradox of love is that it is a free choice, but a choice that never arrives in the present—it is always already made. At a certain moment, I can only state retroactively that *I’ve already chosen*” (166).

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