



**re : public**

asking the question 'can something happen in public again?'

**re : public-  
cation**

**love in public part 1:  
love without romanticism, or:  
how can there be two instead  
of one?**

**exhibition materials 4/2/10-13/3/10**

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## LOVE IN PUBLIC Part 1:

*Love without Romanticism, or:  
how can there be two instead of one?*

10<sup>th</sup> February 1.30pm – 3.30pm: The Event Seminar Group

**Under Discussion:** Firstly, that love is under threat and must be reinvented; and secondly, that beyond the romantic paradigm of love, which understands love as the achievement of union or oneness, there is the possibility that the declaration of love – ‘I love you’ – declares that there are two in the world rather than one. On this basis, love might be thought of as a proto-public relation. Short presentations by members of the Event seminar group will introduce examples of love taken from a range of cultural sources. These will be followed by discussion.

‘Love is always the possibility to participate in the birth of the world.’

‘Properly speaking, love is not a possibility, but rather the opening of something that could have seemed impossible. Something exists that had no reason to be....’

‘I understand ... by “communist” all becoming that makes the in-common prevail over egoism, the collective work over private interest. Incidentally, love is communist in this sense if, like me, one admits that the true subject of a love is the becoming of a couple and not the satisfaction of the individuals of which it is composed. Another possible definition of love: minimum communism!’

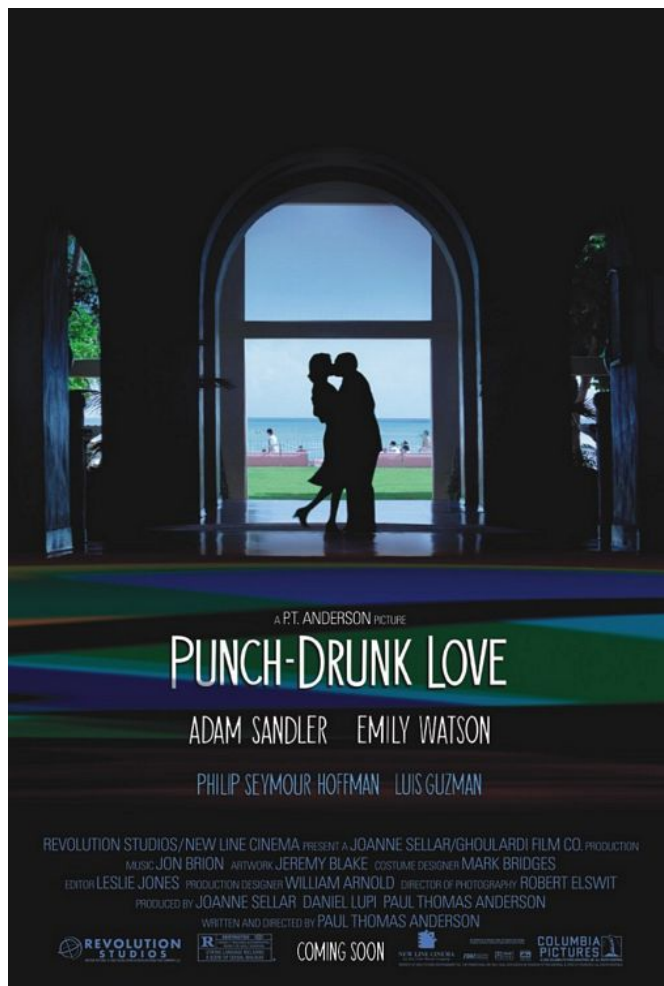
Alain Badiou, *Éloge de l’amour*, 2009

‘Know that although love may be a universal thing, it has nevertheless been condensed into so confined a place that I would boldly assert that it reigns in us alone – that is, it has made its very home in me and you. For the two of us have a love that is pure, nurtured, and sincere, since nothing is sweet or carefree for the other unless it has mutual benefit. We say yes equally, we say no equally, we feel the same about everything. This can be easily shown by the way that you often anticipate my thoughts: what I think about writing you write first, and, as I remember well, you have said the same thing about yourself. Farewell, and regard me with unfading love just as I do you.’

‘The Lost Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise’, § 24 (12<sup>th</sup> C)

‘Yet to hide a passion completely (or even simply to hide its excess) is inconceivable: not because the human subject is too weak, but because passion is in essence made to be seen: the hiding must be seen ... Every passion ultimately has its spectator ... no amorous oblation without a final theatre....’

Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: fragments*, 2002 (1977)



*Punch-Drunk Love*, 2002, directed by Paul Thomas Anderson



Still from *Le Mépris* (Contempt), 1962, directed by Jean-Luc Godard

First of all, for the French philosopher Alain Badiou, the importance of love is that it is, if not the most common of means by which Truth enters unexpectedly into the world

(what Badiou describes as Truth-procedures: the others are art, science, and politics), it is nonetheless the most commonly *proposed*. There is a widespread, common-sense understanding of it, such as that elaborated in novels, Rom-coms, and so on, which cannot be denied or overlooked. This common proposition of love means that it is already happening extensively in public. To think through love is not therefore to introduce something into the public from some other domain, but rather to start from something already present and then to think it differently; that is, as a proto-public relation.

Love is under threat from certain tendencies and techniques, some of which also threaten any non-trivial notion of public. On the one hand, there are various governmental techniques of security, risk assessment and insurance. For example, dating agencies that seek to strategise and minimise the risk of amorous encounters in such a way that one can, in the words of one online site, 'be in love without falling in love' (*être amoureux sans tomber amoureux*). On the other hand, there is the demand for the pleasures of immediate consumption or consummation that result from the pursuit of self-interest.

If it is a case of reinventing love in the face of such techniques, then against security and comfort, 'it is necessary to reinvent risk and adventure' (*Éloge de l'amour* [In Praise of Love]). Rather than simply the exchange of mutual benefits or an investment calculated insofar as it will return future profit, so that by being in love I act economically to further my own interests, falling in love is, in Badiou's arresting phrase, '*trust placed at random*' (*Éloge de l'amour*). In falling in love a lover exposes him- or herself to an incalculable risk. It is only in doing so that in love something can come to exist that had no reason to be.

Against the pursuit of immediate pleasures, which reduce love to a particular intensity of desire, love is a commitment, in the sense that it must be constructed and takes time. Love is obstinate. As important as the ecstasy of encounter might be, insofar as it is from here that something hitherto impossible enters into a world that will never be the same again, Badiou is more interested in the fidelity that follows from it. Paul Éluard once wrote that love is the strong desire to last [*le dur désir de durer*]. How is it that love will last? – This is the question of fidelity.

As all of us know, love does not last forever: love can fail, be betrayed; it can even be thought to have never taken place at all. It is, as Badiou puts it, the desire of 'an unknown duration'. It is unknown because, strictly speaking, it cannot be counted, just as what leads one to fall in love cannot be accounted for. One might say that love introduces a different way of going on in life, in which declarations of the infinite – 'I will always love you', 'I see your face everywhere', and so on – now become common propositions. Such declarations can be vulgarised, of course; and in order to stand the test of them, a life must be reinvented.

The enigma of love consists of the passage from an unforeseen, chance encounter to the paradox of a single world in which we are Two. By way of a declaration of love, this encounter is fixed, so that it now becomes a beginning, its randomness becoming necessary for what is constructed in its

name and what is reconstructed anew on the occasion of each declaration. Fidelity means, then, 'the passage from a chance encounter to a construction as solid as if it had been necessary' (*Éloge de l'amour*).

Where once there were two sexed individuals, One + One, each more or less successfully pursuing his or her self-interest, there is now a new Subject, 'our love', or rather the love that makes of us a Two.

Before moving on to this Two – what it is not, and what it might be – note the particular temporality at work in the construction of a Subject of love. 'As if it had been necessary': Badiou uses here the future anterior – a risky tense. Compare it to other futures: the imperative of 'it will be necessary', the provisionality of 'it would be necessary'. The mode of the first understands a future that is predictable enough that one can make an assertion based upon it; the mode of the second understands a future that is contingent and in the face of which some further consideration is required before a statement of necessity can be made – 'it would be necessary, if...'

The future anterior, however, is risky because it does not guarantee the declarations made in this tense; or, more precisely, guarantees might be available, but not prior to the declaration being made. Only what follows after will show the necessity of a declaration. All that had been done before the declaration, *as if* by guarantee where there was none, in the name of a love that had not yet been named, will be shown to have been necessary. But even this is not guaranteed. Nevertheless, a declaration must be made, irrespective of its hazardous contingency. After all, people keep falling in love despite themselves and keep placing their trust in those who give them no reason to do so.

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So, how can there be Two? First of all, only in so far as what is already given structurally as Two – the non-relation or disjunction of the sexes<sup>1</sup> – is not taken to produce, in love, a One. The 'fusional ecstasy of the One', as Badiou describes it, is at the core of the romantic paradigm of love. It is to this that we owe 'all the metaphors of night, of the obstinate sacralising of the encounter, of the terror inflicted by the world' (Badiou, 'What is Love?').

Such an ecstasy of the One can easily propose death as the ultimate union, against a world that enforces the disjunction of the Two. The most famous examples of this are *Romeo and Juliet* and *Tristan and Isolde*, but there are countless others. Because love is consumed in the ineffable moment of an encounter to which the world remains exterior, if not also envious, unsympathetic, threatening, and so on, love can only be continued in a profound intimacy with death. There follows something like a heroism of the One against the world, a fleeing to the night of a world that is not yet ready for love. Conceived thus, there is no way back to the world from love: either love or lovers must depart from the world.

Consider the following invective from the "Lost Love Letters" of Heloise and Abelard':

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XVII: the reverse of psychoanalysis*, 1970: 'il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel' – 'there is no relation between the sexes'

‘Nor should you be surprised that twisted jealousy should turn its eyes towards such a conspicuous and fitting friendship as ours, because if we were miserable, we could undoubtedly live among others however we liked without any malicious attention. Therefore let them backbite, let them drag us down, let them gnaw, let them waste away inside, let them derive their bitterness from our good things; you will still be my life, my breath, my restoration in difficulty and finally my complete joy’ (§ 29).

Irreducible to this thoroughly romantic, if nonetheless beautiful conception of love, Badiou insists that love always takes place in the world (although incalculable and unforeseeable according to the laws of that world); that lovers face the world, they do not flee from it. There are, perhaps, too few examples within art of the ‘obstinate adventure’ of love: too many examples that demonstrate to us how the non-relation of the sexes corrodes the fusion supposedly achieved in the amorous encounter, of how one + one dissolves the Two (Badiou, ‘La scène du Deux’ [The Scene of Two]).

The fusional ecstasy of the One presents love as the return to wholeness of wounded, incomplete halves (hence, the negative image of love – the broken heart). The most famous account of such love is given by Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium*:

‘This, then, is the source of our desire to love each other. Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature.’ (191d)

Or again, the ultimate desire of a man is:

‘to come together and melt together with the one he loves, so that one person emerged from two. Why should this be so? It’s because, as I said, we used to be complete wholes in our original nature, and now “Love” is the name for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete.’ (192e—193a)

But perhaps such a conception is too bound to an oblation before the Other – the Other as the one who will make one whole, and in doing so become the same. One might find in this oblation a displaced pursuit of self-interest: insofar as we are the same, insofar as we are One, then, *contra* Bryan Adams, everything I do (for you), I do it for myself. Or, again, the lover who oblates him- or herself before the loved one might become incapable of acting in the world until the loved one makes his or her intentions known. Barthes describes this succinctly: ‘Am I in love?—Yes, since I am waiting.’ ... The fatal identity of the lover is nothing other than: *I am the one who waits*’ (*A Lover’s Discourse*).

For Badiou, there is in love no dialectic of Same and Other and no prostration of Same before the Other. Moreover, ‘love is not even an experience of the other, but an experience *of the world*, or of the situation, under the post-evental condition that there are Two’ (‘What is Love?’). Falling and lasting in love is not an enquiry into one another, of getting to know one

another: love does not furnish knowledge of the other. If I were to gain knowledge of the loved one as other then this could only be knowledge of the same, of what I can find in the other that is the same. Likewise, there is no way to determine love as a relation of equivalence or symmetry: such a relation denies the singularity of position of each element in love, because the two, bound by a relation of equivalence, become

indifferent: i.e.  $(a \equiv b) \rightarrow (b \equiv a)$  (‘La scène du Deux’). A

relation between singularities is always asymmetrical. The disjuncture of the Two, of the sexuated positions ‘man’ and ‘woman’, cannot be taken as unreal or as a temporary obstacle to be overcome in love. It is real and ineradicable, and it is handled in love, not overcome, becoming the basis for an enquiry into the world ‘from the vantage point of the Two’ (‘What is Love?’). Hence, ‘To love well is to understand poorly’ (‘What is Love?’).

Counter to the romantic conception of Oneness in love is the sceptical position for which love is an illusion, functioning as a complement or ornament to the real of desire. This position supports a crude evolutionism for which all that exists is desire and the reproductive imperative of the species. It is largely on this basis that love has come to belong to the register of security, for which love is both too risky and unnecessary to the realisation of sexual desires.

Yet love does not compensate (as Lacan sometimes proposed) for the lack of sexual relationship, nor is it an illusion that makes more bearable, more fantastic, the real demands of sexual reproduction. Rather, love *supplements*,

‘and that is something altogether different. Love can only consist in failure on the fallacious assumption that it is a relationship. But it is not. It is a *production of truth*. The truth of what? That truth that the Two, not only the One, proceeds in the situation’ (‘What is Love?’).

Of course, love must pass through desire, but neither deals with the same body. The body of love and the body of desire are differently marked, even as the one becomes the test of the other. After the event of the encounter, the Two must be marked materially in some way. The operator of this marking is a *name* – the declaration of love – and a *differential marking of bodies* (‘What is Love?’).

Love, marking bodies as a treatment of the Two rather than as the One of the object of desire, requires an expansion of the latter, which otherwise, however unveiled, however dispersed among fetishes, remains masturbatory, precisely because it fails to supplant the narcissistic fascination within which its brilliant and enigmatic significations function. One might say that love is what allows one to have approached a body prior to the dazzle of its becoming the object of desire, so that the loved body will be shown to have been encountered beforehand ‘as supernumerary emblem of a truth to come’ (‘What is Love?’).

Is this not precisely what we observe in the extraordinary dance of proximity and reserve between the not-yet/soon-to-be lovers in Wong Kar-Wai’s *In the Mood for Love*? As they

pass each other on the stairs or in the hall of the house in which they are both tenants, the two not-yet-lovers engage in a slow waltz or adagio, already at ease *en scène* before their love has taken place. This proximity of bodies at ease sets the scene for their future love. This scene is one to which both, as neighbours, are adjacent, yet which is the property of neither – no place in particular, then; a common place.<sup>2</sup>

To finally name this ease – that is, to make the declaration of love, and in doing so to declare nothing more nor less than that there were indeed Two where otherwise there would be one + one; or for the not-yet lovers to declare that in their passing on the stairs something other than the place took place: this naming is in excess of the relation between a lover and an object of desire. To declare ‘I love you’ subsumes the object of desire under the being of the subject, affecting a total inversion: it is *you* that I love and not exclusively the object that you carry – ‘it is from the being of the subject that the object, as cause of desire, derives the singularity of its presentation and, finally, the charm of its appearance’ (‘La scène du Deux’).

Counter to the sceptical understanding of love, it is ‘love which makes the truth of which sex is capable, and not the other way around’ (‘La scène du Deux’). This Truth is, of course, that despite or by way of the non-relation of the sexes still there are Two in the world.

Finally, despite the ineradicable disjunction of sexuated positions, Badiou’s thesis is that there is a term that is in relation with the two elements, but which itself does not enter into relation with anything. This term, *u*, is generic, maintaining an infinite relation between the two elements and their belonging to Humanity. It is by way of this ‘humanity function’ that love handles the disjunction of the sexes, because such a generic truth is *trans-positional*.

Humanity here is non-predicative, subtracted from every position, and therefore non-humanist. What disjoins the two sexuated positions is itself one – the one not of union but of a generic humanity that is non-predicative, subtracted from every position, and therefore non-humanist, and yet present as the infinite relation between the Two upon the scene of love.

This term is not the position of an angel or another imaginary third that would announce the formation of a couple to the world. There is no couple in love other than that which is observed and counted as one by such a third: ‘The couple is what, of love, is visible to a third’ (‘What is Love?’). The couple is what makes the Two count-as-one: it is the state (or State) of love. But again, in love such triangulation is not needed.

Hence, there is a *scene of Two*:

‘[Love] is precisely this: the advent of the Two as such, the scene of Two. ... This scene of Two is not a *being* of the Two, since that presupposes the three. This scene of the Two is work, a process. It only exists as a trajectory in the situation, *under the supposition that there are Two*. The Two is the hypothetical operator of an aleatoric enquiry, or such work, or such a trajectory.’ (‘What is Love?’)

<sup>2</sup> On ‘ease’ as the scene of love, see Giorgio Agamben’s *The Coming Community*, 1999, §VI.

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**Part II: Pedagogy and Love: restaging the Symposium.**  
**24<sup>th</sup> February 6pm – 8pm**

Pedagogy, like love, stages a relation of Two to the world. By returning to Plato’s *Symposium* we will ask how the proto-public relation of love can be mediated via pedagogy to become politics. If politics comes after love, then a pedagogical relation that does not begin from love cannot be political. For Badiou, for example, this is why politics cannot be taught by state institutions. What, then, might be a pedagogy of love: a pedagogy not of *what is* but of *what will become*? And how, finally, might this pedagogy become public? **Reading:** A.J. Bartlett, ‘Conditional Notes on a New Republic’, *Cosmos and History: the journal of natural and social philosophy*, volume 2, numbers 1-2, 2006



Culture Programme

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**re : public-ation series**

The **Re : Public-ation** series is a series of texts that provide short readings which introduce key terms and ideas in the debate on public-ness and contemporary culture. These are for educational and cultural use only and intended not for resale. These are produced in conjunction with the exhibition project *re : public* at temple bar gallery co-organised by Temple Bar Gallery and Studios the Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media (GradCAM) 4<sup>th</sup> February – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2010. **re : public** is curated by Daniel Jewesbury and features contributions by Igor Grubić : Owen Hatherley : Peter Liversidge : Aisling O’Beirn : Nina Power : Robert Anderson : Mark Hackett : Sandra Johnston : The Thamesmead Archive : Dennis McNulty : Simon Sheikh : Robert Porter : Leigh French : Neil Gray : Dan Shippides : Seamus Nolan : Dead Public : Amanda Ralph : MA Art in the Contemporary World (NCAD) : MA Art in Public (Ulster) : *Fold* : *Variant* : Tech.Know : Linda Doyle (CTVR) : Experiential Aesthetics : Event: Praxis: and others... For more information on all of these events see ([www.gradcam.ie](http://www.gradcam.ie))

