

It is precisely these notions of motion which Otto-Knapp's paintings render tangible as an existentially social possibility on the threshold of a movement. Of a movement that, were it to constitute itself in accordance with the spirit, humour, and ethos inherent in the form of those multiple motions—the motion also of standing together standing apart—would be a different kind of movement: a feminist movement *indebted and dedicated to the many motions through which the female we it invokes constitutes itself*. This we may form as she, who is me and us, if I, you and we come to be moved by her motions, by the way in which she stretches her limbs, flexes and relaxes her muscles, shifts the weight of her body and world from one side to the other, steps forwards and bends over backwards, falls into and out of step with, gets in touch and loses touch with, holds and is held by others, stands together and apart, stands together standing apart, in the performance of motions that, precisely in being singular, pertain to be moving, and in this existentially social sense, are possible to share.

MASTERS AND SERVANTS OR LOVERS

On Love as a Way to Not Recognize the Other

Love and Recognition

This is a text about being in love with the other. And it is a text about power. The question it seeks to address is: Can love conquer the power of power? That is: Can approaching the other through love create the possibility for a relationship that would not be determined by power games and power structures? Or is this ideal of love as a powerless relation a laudable but laughable illusion since, after all, we all know that there can be no love without power games because such games actually create the attraction between lovers in the first place. We love to dominate or be dominated. But this is not simply a strange path desire takes. The basic desire that firmly connects love to power is the desire for *recognition*. To love the other, we believe, is the most intimate way to recognize the other, to

get to know and understand who he or she really is. Love in this sense is all about the intimate recognition of the other. But this is what power is about as well when it manifests itself in structures of domination. Modern regimes of power are built on the intimate knowledge of who the people are they dominate. Surveillance, espionage and market research are techniques of recognition that help to identify, understand and control the other—be that the citizen, the enemy or the consumer. The question whether or not love can be an alternative to power therefore implies another question: Is love a way to recognize the other that is fundamentally different from the mechanisms of recognition on which power is based? Or is recognition itself the very root of power—because to recognize others in itself means to subject them to one's rule by assigning a fixed identity to them and forcing them to be and stay exactly who and what they have been identified as and understood to be?

If that was so, relationships based on love or power would equally be about imposing a recognizable identity on people and forbidding them to change or be different. 'I see (x) in you. Don't ever change!' or alternately 'I do not accept who you have turned out to be. Therefore I want you to change and become (x).' These are the for-

mulae through which both lovers and regimes subject you to their discipline. From this cynical point of view love would merely be a more subtle and therefore more effective form of shaping someone through pedagogy and punishment. Cynicism always convinces. But it does so because it itself deals in generalisations. Is it not a stereotype in itself that love relations have to end in lovers trying to control each other? Can there not be a love that sets the other free? A love that does not bind but releases the other and gives him or her the freedom to be whatever he or she is or will be? Consequently, this radical love would be a love that goes *beyond recognition*, that is a love in which the lovers would renounce their desire to fully grasp the identity of the other and no longer insist on understanding who the other is. But what would that mean? Would such a radical permissiveness not preclude any form of commitment to the other and in the end amount to little less than a general indifference to what the other may be or do? In this sense, the notion of a radically permissive love may actually be what we have come to understand as the lie of liberalism, the tactic of smothering all differences under the cloak of a (potentially benevolent but effectively oppressive) indifference. What is at stake then, is a love that is at once a definite com-

mitment to the specific difference of the other and a radical openness to who or whatever this other may be or become. To love like this would mean to love how the other is—from head to toe, including the smallest detail (quirk, tick or kink) in the way how he or she may look, talk, think, dress, laugh, cry, fight, make love and so on—and still resist the urge to know exactly who the other is. Could such a love be possible for real?

Equality between Lovers and Mortal Enemies

A text that seeks to describe the relation between the self and other in terms of love, power and recognition cannot but start with the discussion of what probably is one of the most influential and enigmatic passages on this subject in the history of modern philosophy, the chapter on the dialectics of master and servant in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.¹ Hegel starts the chapter with a surprising reversal of the perspective on the relation between self and other as he shows the knowledge of the other to intimately effect the understanding of the self: The reason why it is so crucial for the self to recognize the other, he writes, is that only in this encounter with the other can the self be recognized for what it is in

and for itself—by and through the other. The only form of true recognition, Hegel claims, is mutual. You cannot work out your identity for yourself. It is only in the close encounter with the other that you can learn who you are. The other makes you who you are by recognizing you as who you are, in the same way in which you make the other who he or she is when you recognize him or her.

What at first may sound like an utopian moment of an ideal mutuality and reciprocal understanding, a utopia of perfect love, as you read on, comes to be described as an existentially painful and deeply complicated process. This is because, Hegel claims, to be recognized by the other first of all means to be *destroyed* by the other, and conversely, to recognize the other means to destroy him or her. There is no recognition without a profound violence enacted between and against self and other. Why is that so? Hegel sees true mutual recognition as a moment that radically displaces and transforms the way you understand and relate to yourself. Before that intimate encounter with the other the self indeed already has an understanding of itself, but only a premature one; it lives in a childlike state of unmediated self-love, the emotional bubble that Freud later described as a primary state of narcissism.

The self rests in itself. Yet, it has not experienced what it means to be for itself, because to be for yourself implies that you have learned to look at yourself from the outside. This ability to see yourself as if you were an other depends on the ability to integrate an outside perspective on yourself into your understanding of yourself. And this outside perspective is precisely what the self, in itself, in the state of self-love, lacks or even rejects. But to acquire this outside perspective and reach the point of maturity is a painful process because it presupposes that the narcissistic bubble of self-love must be made to burst. And it is only the other who can do this for you.

By piercing that bubble, getting under your skin and disrupting the intimacy of self-love, the other, however, *kills you*, symbolically, as he or she wipes out your former understanding of yourself. If this encounter is truly mutual this means that you symbolically kill the other as much as he or she kills you—as you upset and uproot his or her world as much as he or she upsets and uproots yours. True recognition, according to Hegel, implies that two people go through an experience together where they wipe each other out and annihilate who they were on their own before. This experience is one of complete dependency of the self on the other and vice versa.

Each person in this relationship is completely at the mercy of the other. Yet, this is only a phase. Through realizing this moment of absolute dependency on each other, each individual comes to see itself through the eyes of the other and, ideally at least, thereby acquires the ability to release the other again into the freedom to now not only be in but also for him or herself. So for Hegel, true recognition can only be achieved through a dialectical procedure in which mutual dependency is pushed to the point of mutual annihilation. Only after forcing one another to overcome their premature self-love can both parties release each other into a higher form of freedom and self-understanding.

Surprisingly, the picture Hegel draws up when he imagines this ideal form of mutual recognition is less that of a bond between lovers and more that of a relation between mortal enemies. (That is, he never actually gives examples for the relations he construes in abstract terms, leaving it provocatively open whether he is talking about lovers or enemies—or in fact about both as being potentially the same thing). As you read on in the chapter, it becomes increasingly clear that Hegel does in fact take the idea that complete mutual recognition must presuppose the potential to *destroy* the other quite literally. He appears to be

thinking of an actual threat. The way he portrays the true moment of recognition in this sense can be seen to invoke a scene on a battlefield where two opponents realize that they both have the power to kill the other here and now—and thus recognize each other as absolute equals. Whether they actually proceed to kill or spare each other then does not make any difference anymore because they have made the experience that it is through the other that they can die and hence it is only because of the other that both can continue to live, should they both decide to refrain from doing what is in their power to do.

Enemies and Lovers in the Cinema

Cinema has shown us this supreme moment of recognition between equal adversaries in infinite variations, primarily in thrillers, martial-arts films or Western movies. Some of the strongest images for this scene, however, were shot by Sam Peckinpah (from whom Quentin Tarantino learned a lot). A crucial moment in Peckinpah's ultra-violent Westerns, take the *The Wild Bunch* (1969) as an example, is a showdown between ruthless desperados, holding each other at gunpoint, ready to shoot and kill, whereupon they all break out in loud laughter, lower their weapons

and ride on together as one posse. As Peckinpah spells out Hegel's idea of a mutual recognition between supreme opponents, it becomes clear that this idea in fact implies a model for a social contract. It is the model of a clandestine society of sovereign individuals, a brotherhood of those who have no respect for the laws of ordinary society because all of them are kings and queens in their own right—but still a brotherhood of equals built on the shared experience that each member of the group could at any time give death to or receive death from any other. So the basis for this bond is neither friendship nor loyalty but the recognition of a kinship between sovereign loners. No doubt, this glorification of a heroic pact sealed by the temporary suspension but constant threat of violence seems overblown. Still, this model does evoke and describe many aspects of the bonds forged within bohemian circles, where the mutual recognition that all members of a group are equally vulnerable to the criticism of all others seems indeed to create long lasting affiliations—as those who know how to deeply hurt each other flock together. And maybe this is not even as ironic as it sounds. After all, to share the secret of one's vulnerability with others who are vulnerable in the very same way (as they also long for recognition and fear rejection by the public)

may not be such a bad way to bond.

In the movies this ideal of a bond between equal opponents has, however, not only been interpreted as a model for bonds between brothers in arms but also as a model for love. There is, of course, Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1954) in which Johnny (Sterling Hayden) meets his match in Vienna (Joan Crawford), a lady who is equally fast with her gun as he is. Yet, closer however to the idea of two adversaries becoming lovers through the recognition of their power to kill each other are the scenarios depicted in martial-arts films, such as Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) or *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). Here, the only way for the two heroes to realize their love is to perform an elaborate ceremony of fighting each other. It is only when they have their blades at each other's throat and have thus proven to be absolute equals that they can recognize each other as lovers. As much as this image of love as a heroic struggle with the other may seem like a questionable return to the age-old fantasy of the battle of the sexes, it also breaks with it. Part of that fantasy has always been that there is no equality in this battle since women fight with other weapons than men (emotion and charm versus reason and physical strength). Notably then, in Zhang Yimou's fantasy women and men

do engage in battle with the very same powers. As they are equals in conflict, full mutual recognition between them can be achieved. Whether this vision of the equality and similarity of self and other, women and men is truly emancipatory—or whether it is, on the contrary, a myth that obscures all those insurmountable differences between people (in terms of class, gender, race or social background) which inspire, complicate and often enough ruin love relations—remains the question.

Master and Servant and the Revolutionary Promise of Happiness

It also precisely these differences and painful inequalities that Hegel focusses on towards the end of the chapter. As you read on, contrary to what you may at first have assumed, the state of full mutual recognition now comes to seem less like an actual possibility but more like an abstract ideal that in real life is hardly ever realized. According to Hegel, human relations, on the contrary, tend to be shaped by the failure to fully recognize the other. This is because, Hegel argues, people rarely succeed to completely give themselves up, sacrifice and destroy each other in the moment of their encounter. One party always suffers more

while the other prevails. Far more often than equal enemies intimate conflicts then produce a winner and a loser, a master and a servant. In this case, however, it is not only the chance to recognize the other that is lost. Since self-recognition only becomes possible through the recognition of the other, even the party that apparently emerges triumphant from the struggle has in fact lost all that there was to win: the full recognition by an equal opponent. The victor may have gained power over the other. By enslaving the other, however, the winner deprives the other of the very *dignity* that the other could have bestowed upon him or her in return, had the other been recognized and set free as an equal. In the moment of victory, winners thus deprive themselves of their own victory, since they rob the other of the very gift that the other could have given to them. They smash the mirror in which they could have truly recognized themselves.

In the long run, Hegel argues, time will therefore be on the side of those who lost. Without immediately realizing it, their defeat has actually put them in a much better position to truly recognize who they are than the victor and master. As the self-esteem of the winner has suffered relatively little in the conflict, the winner has missed the chance to be changed and elevated by

the relation to the other and will remain arrested in the original state of premature self-love—a child alone on its throne. Since, conversely, the self-love and pride of the loser has been shattered for good, he or she now has much better chances to rise above and develop a mature self-understanding. Those who have lost at first can gain the true victory over time, yet, Hegel argues, neither through fighting nor love but through *work*. The master will make the others work for him and they will do so at first in a state of utter humiliation. But precisely because they start with nothing their work will fully transform them into people who know who they are and what they do in life for themselves. Their work will give them the very recognition that the master could neither give nor receive (as the fast and easy triumph has isolated the master in a lonely power position). This twist in Hegel's argument has in fact inspired some of the most influential ideas about the uprising of the oppressed other in modern history. Marx based his theory of the revolution of the working classes on this passage. With recourse to Hegel, Franz Fanon argued that the only way how the colonized could liberate and truly recognize themselves was first of all to fully acknowledge that what had initially been their culture and identity had been totally and

irreversibly destroyed by the colonizers, to start from zero in a state of dependency and reinvent themselves as free people. Those who suffered oppression can thus open up a future for themselves that the colonizers will never have since they never lost their past.²

No matter how much hope these thoughts inspire, the idea that humiliation is the condition for a later emancipation must equally provoke criticism. Rather than a theory of revolution, Hegel's initial model of master and servant could also be understood as being no more than a justification of a protestant work ethics and disciplinary pedagogy that breaks the individual first to then shape it into a hard-working citizen, worker or soldier. *Per aspera ad astra*, as they told you in school. Why should it be necessary to break anyone in the first place? Can such violence ever be justified? And how can you assume that the recognition you receive through work could ever equal the mutual recognition experienced in a moment of love? But then it would be wrong to assume that Hegel justifies the necessity of oppressive conditions since, notably, he starts his argument by picturing a situation of freedom and after this implicitly portrays all other constellations as less ideal. You could even find comfort in his words for, after all, he maintains that,

when everything goes wrong, there are still ways to work through the crisis and resolve it through the proactive acknowledgement of pain. So even though Hegel at first seems to give a rather grim outlook on the chances of human relations to ever turn out well, he never fully renounces the possibility that happiness may be found in the encounter with the other—and thus maintains and endorses a certain *promesse de bonheur*. That said, of course, it could be objected that the promise of *redemption* offered by the dialectic of master and servant does in fact closely resemble a fantasy of *revenge*. For what does the promise that one day the humiliated will prevail over their oppressors amount to if not to the age-old dream that, when judgement day cometh, it will be payback time? We know all too well by now that for centuries religions and ideologies used the promise that one day the last will be first to keep people quite and make them accept their suffering as a necessary pathway to a happiness in an imaginary after-life (be it heaven or communism).

In much the same way we know that disappointed lovers whistling 'time is on my side'² will most certainly be fooling themselves. For even though, no doubt, you can't hurry love, you cannot wait for happiness either, can you? If happiness is to be real, it must be real now, in the

present, in an *ongoing, uninterrupted state of presence*, must it not? Sounds familiar, no? 'And they lived happily ever after.' Is the only state of happiness with the other we are prepared to accept the state of continuous bliss we learned about in church sermons and fairy tales? Has anyone ever met anyone who lived with an other in the continuous presence of happiness? Or is it not rather the crux of living with others that, by virtue of being others and having different needs and desires, they will always be disturbing the total harmony of continuous happiness? If that was so, would it then not be much closer to the truth to acknowledge that happiness in itself *is* a promise. Is it not the secret of the brief moments of happiness we experience that essentially prove the best is yet to come? So that the value of those glimpses of happiness lies in the fact that they make a promise seem real? To be happy with the other would then mean to experience the promise of happiness *with* the other, to feel that this promise is immanent to the relation to the other and to see that the *shared experience of this promise*—and not its phantasmagorical fulfillment—is in itself the root and reality of a fulfilled life with the other. True happiness may therefore already be realized in the shared sensation that you will *have a future* with the other, whatever that future

may bring. Yet, to muster the amount of trust in the other that it takes to live together with little more to rely on but a promise, it seems, is one of the most difficult things to do.

To Love is to Give What you Don't
Have and Get What (You Think)
You Don't Need

If you now, however, turn to psychoanalysis and read what Lacan had to say about the dialectics of recognition, love, power and the possibility of liberation and happiness even this moment of hope will come to seem questionable. Lacan in fact argues that the single most important reason for the failure of relationships is precisely the desire to find someone who could make you happy by giving you the love (you think) you need. The source of the problem, according to Lacan, is that people do not understand what they need even if they believe to know what they want. What people want from love, Lacan writes, is easy to grasp: 'To love is, essentially, to wish to be loved.'³ To wish to be loved, however, does not just mean to wish to be loved in general—but to be loved in a specific way by a particular person. It is the wish to be recognized and understood by another person in exactly the way that you ideally

want to be recognized and understood. You want the other to see the *ideal you* in you and confirm that you are exactly who you think you are and want to be. Yet, in the very same way that people are really bad at figuring out what they need, they are notoriously confused about who they are. As a result, love is bound to become a farce. You may get all the love and recognition that you want from the other. He or she may see you exactly like you want to be seen. Still you will not feel happy because even though what you get is what you want, it is not what you need. And even though you are recognized as who you wish to be, this is not who you are. You feel that something is wrong somewhere and become unhappy.

After this, things will only get worse. The more you get what you *want*, the more you will feel that this is not what you *need*. The more the other will try to understand you, the less you will feel understood. The more of the ideal you the other sees in you, the more shabby this will make you feel about yourself. Paradoxically, you will then begin to hate the other for giving you exactly the love you want—and not the love you need. This love, however, the love you truly need, Lacan writes, is a love that is impossible to get. Since you yourself don't know what you need, it is even harder for the other to figure out what

it may be. This is one more reason to hate your lover. For not only does he not give you what you need, he also fails to understand what that could be. And, if anything, to understand what you need, is something you would expect from a true lover, wouldn't you? So the more confused you are about your own needs, the more you will demand from your lover to know what you don't know and solve the puzzle of your needs for you, in your stead. Lacan accordingly describes the situation of the lover who is supposed to know as similar to that of a waiter in a Chinese restaurant. Confronted by a menu that is all in Chinese the confused guest will demand from the waiter: '*patronne—Recommend something*. This means: *You should know what I desire in all this.*'⁴ Naturally, this is impossible for the waiter to know. Still, he will be blamed for bringing something wrong.

This knowledge of your needs is exactly the *extra* bit of love that you will always demand from your lover as a proof of true love—but will always find missing. It is the most intimate knowledge about yourself that he cannot have because you don't have it either. In other words: By demanding to be loved by the other, you seek that thing in the other that could make you feel completely fulfilled and totally happy with yourself. Yet, this thing is something the other can never have nor

give. By demanding self-fulfillment from love, the thing you want from the other is you. But what the other cannot give you *is you*, quite simply because the other is the other and not you. For this inevitable disappointment of your demands you will hate and punish the other. The formula of disappointed love, according to Lacan, therefore is: 'I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you... I mutilate you.'⁵ In short, you come to hate your lover because the only thing your lover can give you is *himself* and not *yourself*. 'I was feeling bad and all I got from you was you.'⁶ This is the bottom line. But the disappointment is mutual. While you feel unfulfilled, your lover will feel that no matter what he gives, it is *never enough*. Worse still, when he gives himself to you, he will learn that he himself, all that he is, is not enough. Lacan captures this moment of utter disappointment and humiliation in the formula: 'I give myself to you... but this gift of my person—as they say—Oh, mystery! is changed inexplicably into a gift of shit.'⁷ In the end both lovers will feel empty and unfulfilled, one for not *getting*, the other for neither *having* nor *being* that which was needed and could have made both happy.

The irony of it all is that even though mutual disappointment seems inevitable, it could so eas-

ily be prevented. If people only knew what they really needed from the other, they might actually find that they were getting it all along. But since they were so fixated on what they believed they wanted, they were too blind to see that they maybe had all it would have taken for them to be happy with the other and with themselves. Still, Lacan remains guarded when it comes to the possibility of a resolution to the mutual misrecognition of lovers. He offers no hope for happiness. At best, and this is already a big effort, lovers may admit to themselves that giving each other fulfillment is beyond their powers. And ideal state of love, following Lacan, would lie in the mutual recognition that both sides do not have the power to give the other the fairy-tale happiness they desire. The ideal recognition of love would lie in the moment when you face each other with empty hands. By realizing that the other doesn't have what you don't have either, you at least spare your lover the humiliation of having to learn that it was not him but *you* that you were looking for all the time. If you add a dose of humour to the moment when two lovers see through the farce they have been playing, this moment of recognition seems almost possible if not bearable. It might even be crowned by the realisation that, since no one really knows who they are and what

they want, this charade of surreal misrecognitions might make you (unwittingly) become for the other what you have never been for yourself. In a moment of misunderstanding, you may find that you went beyond yourself and actually gave something to the other that you never had. Still, you must be prepared for the realisation that this never was what the other needed.

Love beyond Recognition

To end on a low, however, seems inappropriate when it comes to love. After all, what is love if not that one feeling that, against all odds and reasonable objections, will always inspire hope. This, it seems, is because it lies in the nature of love to open things up, just as hate, conversely closes things down between people. In much the same way that hate marks the end of a relationship, true love stands at its beginning. Maybe love always and only exists in this mode of continuous beginning. If it lasts, this may only be, because *it never stops beginning*. But what could this love that never stops to begin to open up a relation to the other look like? It would have to be a love that can never be finished with the other and therefore can never finish, that is destroy, the other either. In the light of what Hegel and

Lacan write on the fate of love it appears that, first of all, it is the desire for recognition that finishes love as it stops the relation to the other from remaining open. The wish to be recognized in a particular way by the other generates expectations and disappointments as much as it produces dependencies and the power game of masters and servants. It makes you dependent on the recognition given by the other in the same way as you make the other dependent on your wish to be recognized. Since the other is expected to give what the other does not have, the gift of self-fulfillment, the other lives with a debt that can never be paid. By putting the other in a state of debt that cannot be settled, the desire for recognition therefore sets an end to the relation with the other before it could even start to begin. But if it was true then that the desire for recognition is the source of all trouble, would that not mean that the one love that will never stop beginning an open relation to the other has to be a love that goes *beyond recognition*?

With this question we return to the question raised in the beginning: If you renounced the desire to recognize and be recognized by the other would you then not give up any commitment to the other? Could you ever *not* wish to be understood and made happy by the one you love?

Could you ever cease to wish you could understand and make the other happy? Would such love beyond recognition not resemble a form of permissiveness that testifies to the lack of any truly intimate bond?

Giorgio Agamben tries to answer this question and show that there can indeed be a commitment in (and to) a radical openness in relation to the other, a commitment that in fact could not be deeper, more primary and existential.⁸ He argues that true love is *beyond* recognition because it comes *before* recognition. It precedes it. You may fall in love with the other, he writes, before you get to know him or her. In this sense love is a more primary approach to the other than controlled forms of recognition and rational understanding. To bring out this point more clearly Agamben quotes Heidegger quoting Pascal with the words: 'And thence it comes about that in the case of where we are speaking about human things, it is said to be necessary to know them before we love them, and this has become a proverb; but the saints, on the contrary, when they speak of divine things, say that we must love them before we know them.'⁹ That would mean that to know the other you have to love the other first. There is no knowledge of precious things without and before love makes it possible. It is

love that opens up the relation to anything of any worth in the first place. Opening up to the other in love is therefore a commitment that could not be more primary. Still, love is not blind. In what way could the intimate perception of the other it implies be said to be radically different from the power of recognition?

Love, Agamben concedes, indeed implies some mode of recognition, yet this mode, he continues, is fundamentally different from an understanding of the other in terms of the expectations projected upon a person of whom one believes to know what to expect. In this mode of love, Agamben claims, recognizing the other means committing oneself to *whatever* the other is and may become. This *whatever*, paradoxically is all inclusive and open at the same time. To love the other in this sense means to love whatever—and that is anything and everything, not just some things—about the other. It is an unconditional love that implies a full commitment to the other's *way of being*. But at the same time this *whatever* also implies an infinite patience and empathy towards anything the other may be. In its effects this *empathy towards whatever* the other would be impossible to tell apart from a general indifference towards the other, were it not for the one decisive difference that it is from the point of

view of love—and that is from the vantage point of a primary existential commitment the other's way of being—that this all-inclusive dedication to the other becomes possible. In this sense, Agamben writes: 'Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favour of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the *as* only insofar as it is *such*—this is the lover's particular fetishism.' ¹⁰

Letting the Other Be, in Love, Calmly

What is this way of being then that the lover loves about the beloved? How does it show itself? Agamben says that this way of being manifests itself in the guise, fashion and manner of how you live your life. As such this way of being then includes all mannerisms you may acquire, all misrecognitions you may suffer from and all the masks that you subsequently put on and present to others. In fact, an all-encompassing love for a way of being does not distinguish between a 'real you' and a persona you may play for others. It is the recognition of the particular style of perform-

ing that persona and shifting between different roles and selves that becomes the residue of this love. It is in this sense that the mode of recognition implied in a love for (whatever is part of) the other's way of being differs crucially from the types of recognition Hegel and Lacan discuss: It is neither the ideal nor the real nor the true self that this lover seeks to recognize in the other. It is neither perfection nor fulfillment but possibility that this lover recognizes. To love whatever is part of the other's way of being means to understand the other in terms of his or her possibilities, in terms of all the things which he or she can be—and also which he or she cannot be. When it comes to a particular way of being the difference between possibilities and incapacities disappears because what people can and cannot do equally determines how they live their life. Even more often than their positive possibilities, it is in fact their incapacities, limitations and blindnesses that push—and thereby enable—people to perform, improvise and invent the little tricks, ploys and betrayals that shape their way of being.

To love all this about the other and love the other because of all this, however is not the expression of some heavenly patience or sublimely detached point of view. Since all those things that make up a way of being manifest themselves in

the facticity of everyday life, it is here that love finds its milieu. It is in and through the small, sometimes happy, sometimes failed exchanges and encounters that the love for the other's way of being is realized. But how can you live that love? What can you do to put this commitment to the other into practice? The approach Agamben advocates is a particular form of *active passivity*. Loving whatever is part of the way the other is, is all about finding ways to *let the other be*. First of all, this approach implies an attitude of calmness and composure in relation to the other. It is about giving the other the time and space to emerge and show him or herself. As such the attitude of letting the other be is the opposite of an approach determined by the expectation that the other should declare his or her love and identity right away. Only this calmness, Agamben argues, can make you attentive to the manners and fashions through which the other shows his or her way of being. By rushing things, on the contrary, you make it impossible for yourself to recognize and attune yourself to the slow process in which these all important aspects come to show themselves.

The attitude Agamben invokes here is the existential stance of *Gelassenheit*, the notion of which Heidegger developed throughout his philosophy.

In common language *Gelassenheit* denotes an attitude of calmness, composure or simply relaxedness. Heidegger, however, points out that the noun is built around the verb *lassen* which means *letting* (something be or happen) so that the word *Gelassenheit* literally translates as the attitude or state of mind of letting things be. According to Heidegger this attitude is crucial because it is only in this state of calm that you are ready and attentive enough to truly experience an unforeseeable event (or rather the event of the unforeseeable) and in this sense allow things to happen. Yet, beyond this stance of openness and attentiveness, *Gelassenheit* has a more proactive meaning because, Heidegger reminds us, *lassen, to let* is in fact an active verb, a verb that denotes an activity. To let the other be in this sense then actually means to give the other the chance, possibility and opportunity to be—and thereby actively enable, empower or even provoke the other to be whatever he may be or become. In this active sense letting others be is a way to call them forth to present themselves, not by commanding their presence but simply by providing the space and attention to allow this to happen. So, practically, this love is about learning ways to make the other come, to make each other come.

Calmness or Crisis—Can Lovers Ever Let the Other Be?

All of this may sound beautiful, but there are substantial objections. The first and most obvious doubt to be voiced is whether the celebration of *Gelassenheit* as an attitude that prepares you for all encounters is not in fact the quintessential illusion of philosophy? For what is that *Gelassenheit* if not *the* philosophical attitude to life? (Californians seem to have it, too, though.) So all that these reflections amount to may be an illusion perpetuated by philosophers that being philosophical about life actually helps. Since there is no evidence that philosophical people live more happily than others, it may seem wise to treat their words of wisdom cautiously. And there are more reasons to be doubtful: Is it, for instance, not a common experience that passionate love can never be calm? Passionate love is a rush and demands for things to be rushed. If you are in love there is never time to wait. You want the other to know that you love him or her. Waiting too long for the right moment to make the other know may mean that this moment will have passed and the opportunity to come together will have been lost. What's more, can you ever wait for your lover to

come? Does it not lie in the nature of the desire for a lover that it must always be satisfied right away? The time for love, it seems, is forever dictated by the demand 'I need you now tonight' (as 'Forever's gonna start tonight', ¹¹ always, again, anew). Sadly for those who wait, an instant lover usually is readily available for those who feel they have no time to loose. But maybe this is how it goes when love has its way. There never is time to wait.

So forget *Gelassenheit*. Apparently, it is of no use between lovers. It might work between people in general and in fields of modern life where emancipated and respectful forms of behaviour are not only expected but also appreciated. But it takes a fool to assume that such ethical principles of emancipated and respectful behaviour would also apply to love. Even if a love without respect might at first seem unthinkable, it turns out, that the insistence on treating your lover respectfully can in some situations be perceived as the worst possible insult. In that moment showing respect is no longer a sign of love but a measure of actively withholding it, a way of remaining guarded and reserved in a situation that demands immediate actions. What is not needed in this second of crisis is words which suggest that someone understands. What is needed is acts that assure

the lover of your love. The only choice left in that situation, it seems, is to *get physical* in whatever way—even if what the other demands you to do to would mean to treat the other without respect and do things that may make you lose your self-respect in the process, too. In the rush of this moment, when the assurance of the intensity of your relation through definite acts is desired right away, to refrain from doing such things out of respect for the other can then only earn you disrespect from the other, since, after all, you prove to be not much of a lover by failing to act when actions are most wanted. Maybe this is a higher wisdom of the passions that is beyond philosophy and strictly a matter of practical experience.

But maybe this thirst for the rush of the moment also quite simply is one of the most physical manifestations of the unholy desire for recognition which Hegel maps in the dialectics of master and servant and which Lacan analyses as a psychopathology. So maybe it is in this moment of crisis that the desire to be recognized becomes so overwhelming that it can only be satisfied by a physical act that immediately delivers the intense physical sensation of self-satisfaction, no matter if that feeling is pain or pleasure. If that was so we would be right back where we started and *Gelas-*

senheit, the ability to keep calm and thereby calm the other down could indeed be an answer. Still, how can you ever calmly let an other *be* whose way of being (in love) includes the desire to perform *and* be subjected to potentially destructive acts? If love can never be therapy for the very reason that it can never give the other the feeling of complete self-fulfillment which the other may so desperately desire, the only question that remains then is how much trouble and pain love can stand and survive. Human beings are tough. So there is hope. But there are limits. Yet, to see where the limits are to what you can take may be as difficult as to grasp what it is that you really need or want.

It seems to lie in the nature of love and other intense relations to the other that their failure or success is decided in extreme moments of conflict when antagonisms culminate in a crisis that either results in reconciliation or separation. And maybe the fabrication of crisis is the most effective way to bring about decisions by forcing them. Still, there is also another reality of love and relating to the other that exists beyond the drama of decisions concerning the success and failure of that relation. This reality might be about a different sense of drama which manifests itself in a less spectacular way in mo-

ments of small acts and performances. Adorno, for instance, points to the potential of situations where lovers intuitively mimic each other and mirror the manners of the other.¹² Adorno's idea of attuning oneself attentively to the other's way of being implies an embrace of the theatricality of everyday exchanges. He writes: 'What is human is attached to imitation: a human being turns into a human being first by imitating other human beings. In such behavior, the Ur-form of love, the priests of genuineness scent traces of that utopia, which could shake the apparatus of domination.'¹³ The 'priests of genuineness' who Adorno mocks are Nietzsche and presumably also Heidegger. What he rejects is their belief in the possibility of the authentic fulfillment of the self. What he still embraces though, if hesitantly, is the utopian potential of mutual imitation. It is only that for him this potential lies precisely in the full acknowledgment of the inauthenticity and unfulfilled character of human relations that is implied in the act of performing theatrically in relation to the other. It is an inauthenticity that is full of intimacy.

To picture such a moment would lead us onto the stage of ballet and the images of performers circling round each other attentively in a silent dance which intimately affirms the presence of

the other through gestures and poses that draw the other close and give the other space, that seize and release the body of the other and may transgress the difference of self and other by pushing imitation to a point at which gestures are no longer owned by one or the other, man or woman, master or servant, but may equally be performed by either of them. So if there is hope in love it may lie in the way to touch the other and be touched by the other in an encounter not of egos but bodies that mimic each other and thus affirm their way of being in whatever it may come to be. In the absence of a desire for recognition this love would instead be propelled by the continued mutual fascination with all that remains inexplicable and incomprehensible about the other. Driven by this fascination, mimicking the inexplicable other will make the language by which the lovers address each other become creolic. Copying the other's idiom and accent, they will invent their very own kind of pidgin and, speaking in voices that are not their own, they will exchange compliments and gifts of undeterminable meaning and value. This way they may even learn to give what they do not have and happily receive what they do not need.

- 1 G.W.F. Hegel, 'Selbständigkeit und Unselbständigkeit des Selbstbewusstseins; Herrschaft und Knechtschaft' in *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1980), 127-136.
- 2 Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). (London: Pluto Press, 1986).
- 3 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 253.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 268.
- 6 Chorus lyrics from Her Majesty: *You and me against the world*. s 56 recordings 2004.
- 7 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 268.
- 8 Giorgio Agamben, 'The Passion of Facticity,' in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 185-204. All further arguments concerning the notion of love as letting the other be are summaries of the thoughts formulated by Agamben in this essay.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 186.
- 10 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 2.
- 11 Bonnie Tyler, 'Total Eclipse of The Heart'.
- 12 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Goldprobe,' in *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951), Aphorism 99, pp. 201-206.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 204. English translation by Dennis Redmond quoted after www.efn.org/~dredmond/MinimaMoralia.html

UNDER THE SIGN AND IN THE SPIRIT OF A STOA

On the Work of Cerith Wyn Evans

Where can we meet? Not just to talk. Or to look at something and be entertained. But rather, to find out what happened and what life is going to be like. But we can't do that in public, or at your place, or at mine. It makes as little sense at the market as it does at home. *Agora* and *oikos* are both equally unsuitable. In the former the voices are too loud, in the latter too soft. We won't be able to say very much to each other anyway, because in either place conventions control what things mean. At the market and in the household what constitutes meaning and value is understood. But the constitution of meaning and value is exactly what we want to understand—and contest. So there's no point in having a conversation there. We would have to find someplace else so that our meeting can take a different turn. There's a place like that in Greek philosophy. It's the stoa.¹ It lies between *agora* and *oikos*. It's a