

Preface to Love

... the lover's discourse is today of an extreme solitude. This discourse is spoken, perhaps, by thousands of subjects (who knows?), but warranted by no one; it is completely forsaken by the surrounding languages: ignored, disparaged, or derided by them, severed not only from authority but also from the mechanisms of authority (sciences, techniques, arts). Once a discourse is thus driven by its own momentum into the backwater of the 'unreal', exiled from all gregariness, it has no recourse but to become the site, however exiguous, of an affirmation.

— Roland Barthes, 1978

This issue of *Public* is devoted to love's discourses, its images, its contradictions and its Nature. In the spirit of Roland Barthes' "fragments of a lover's discourse," we have gathered together a number of works that explore figures of love in different cultural and historical settings.

Love has consistently been positioned in the private and feminine realm of emotion, poetry, imagination and dream – as Barthes puts it: "the backwater of 'the unreal'." It has consistently been given a place of non-authority, situated in opposition to concrete reason, necessity and rational action. The principle aim behind this issue of *Public* is to explore and disturb the place of love. The works included here share a concern with love as historical creation, with love as inextricably tied up in revolution, anarchy, technology, the natural world and language – and with language as shaped by love.

We should confess that this issue was, initially, conceptualized with a certain postmodern cynicism. We did not want to rescue love, to imbue it with a new authority that would level its anarchistic edge (legitimizing those fools who would do *anything* for love). Nor did we want to appear to be sanctioning some kind of 'new age' transcendentalism. Perhaps most of all we did not want to be sentimental. And yet as Barthes understood so well, the only way to be truly transgressive (which means to create a new understanding) is to transgress the intellectual orthodoxies that define transgression.

Thus, the love between these sheets is not completely accounted for as discourse. And though it is difficult to resist the seductive teleology of the 'love story' with its promise of unilateral progress and resolution, we have attempted not to narrativize love. Neverthe-

less, here is perhaps where *Public*¹⁰ parts company with the “*absolutely insignificant order*” of *A Lover’s Discourse*. Two interrelated tropes inform the structuring of this issue: romantic love and revolutionary passion. The “amorous relation,” described so eloquently by Barthes as a relation of Otherness, is extended to include various modalities of social existence; juxtaposing theological and political, universal and particular, global and narcissistic interests. We have attempted to suggest not only the profound heterogeneity of love across these different bodies but also, its function within the modern social imaginary. Both romantic and revolutionary passion are directed by ‘forces’ (physical/political) outside and beyond the subject’s control. Forces that have the power to dissolve boundaries and identities, to level property, to dispossess and overwhelm the self in “unforseeable rhythms”...and sometimes, to transfigure the world.

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