







(an attempt to define)
AM

PERFORMATIVITY IN COUPLES

AM
IS
ANTRIANNA MOUTOULA
OR
AFTER MIDNIGHT
IF YOU WANT

- hello

- hi

- how are you?

- good and you?

- good

- what's your name?

-

STEPS WE HAVE TO WALK TOGETHER:

BEFORE: surprise, surprise!

STEP ZERO: performing in everyday life

STEP ONE: the acting spaces

STEP TWO: why would you form a couple anyway?

STEP THREE: i love you, i don't love you.
the relationship before and after that

STEP FOUR: is real life inspired by fiction, or does fiction
set the ideals for our personal life?

STEP FIVE: personal stories

STEP SIX: observing couples

LAST STEP: happy ending?

AFTER: sources

...

(It's always good to take some space for yourself)

To my parents' divorce.



(ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS TWO
TWO PLUS TIMES EQUALS LOVE OR M

(ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS TWO
TWO PLUS TIMES EQUALS LOVE OR M

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TWO PLUS TIMES EQUALS LOVE OR M

Surprise, surprise! I need to tell you something before we go any further.

This text is wondering, this text is questioning, this text cannot sleep because of this question: When I am in a couple, an erotic couple, do I offer my partner the most honest version of myself that I can be? Is it the space where I am not afraid to be my real self, share my fears and insecurities, show the things that even I don't know about me yet? Or is this where most of all I have to continuously perform the role which I together with my significant other and society constructed and gave me to perform?

Writing is speaking. The difference I find is that when you speak you only have one voice. Maybe because she is incapable of escaping the instrument of her reproduction: You. You might be able to imitate voices but still, it is your mouth speaking your voice. While writing I witnessed more than one voice appearing. Someone could argue that my writing voice could also not escape me as an instrument of reproduction. However, I feel my writing voice being consciously or subconsciously influenced by external factors. The speaking voice usually requires an immediate audience or comes to existence as a reaction to the presence of a listener. You say something to someone. Most of the time. The writing voice often appears at moments when the writer is not busy with the presence of another person. Writing can expand through a plethora of techniques, one of them being automatic writing where a writer attempts to minimize the influence the outcome receives from brain editing procedures. I am not a scientist, I do not have the knowledge to explain brain processes occurring while writing or speaking. I can only attempt to notice their differences. I do notice my writing splitting into different voices. I wonder how they can be that different if they are all mine. There might be many more voices inside me but for now I would like to isolate two and let them be a couple. The first more sober, tidy, attempting to define notions. Attempting to find answers. The other one live streaming my thoughts, fluid, impossible to edit. Feels like the vomit of my heart filtering through my brain before coming out. Vomit voice is asking, sober voice is trying to answer. If I could I would turn all this text into a performance and you wouldn't have to read this paper now but since I cannot I will leave her spread around, reminding you how this text should be perceived. I lied a little bit. I do think it is important to put it on paper but please don't tell my vomit voice. Vomit voice performs, sober voice acts.

While writing this essay I found endless useful, inspiring material to help me think further. From Goffman's essay, to Godard's film, Sarah Kane's monologue, the reactions of my partner or the stories of my parents about their relationships and Etta James' "I'd rather go blind". Some of them translated into blocks of text where sources are clearly footnoted. For others this is impossible. I am aware of their influence but I cannot spot a phrase under which they should be footnoted. On the other hand I find important they all stand on the sources list as they were crucial to the development of my research.

Before we start talking about something that personal it is important to meet each other. Hello. I am Antrianna. Like this text I am wondering, I am trying to understand, I cannot sleep because of that same question. I am a child of divorced parents (the first couple I tried to analyze). I inhaled love and let it fade while exhaling. I have been cowardly shy and stupidly risky. I have been serving in the restaurant where you ate. I have been observing you, thinking of you. I am trapped between my two voices because neither of them alone ever managed to explain what I mean. Who are you?



FOOLY BOOKED

INSIDE A ROOM THAT LOOKS LIKE A RESTAURANT, A SPACE FILLED BY TABLES FOR TWO WITH TWO CHAIRS FACING EACH OTHER. ALL THE TABLES ARE OCCUPIED BY COUPLES. EXCUSE US BUT TONIGHT WE ARE FOOLY BOOKED. YOU PASS BY THE DOOR. YOU CAN HEAR THE SOUND OF CONSTANT TALKING. YOU GO IN. YOU NOTICE THAT THE COUPLES DO NOT INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER. EACH INDIVIDUAL SPEAKS ONLY TO HIS PARTNER, LOOKS ONLY TO HER PARTNER'S EYES. YOU WALK IN BETWEEN THE TABLES. THEY DO NOT NOTICE YOU. YOU ARE ONE AND YOU ARE ALMOST INVISIBLE. YOU DON'T MIND, YOU LIKE TO OBSERVE THEM EVEN MORE NOW. EVENTUALLY YOU REALIZE THAT CONVERSATIONS ARE ALL THE SAME. THEY GO LIKE THIS:

-I LOVE YOU

-I LOVE YOU TOO

-I LOVE YOU VERY MUCH

-VERY MUCH?

-YES

-I LOVE YOU TOO

-DO YOU STILL LOVE ME

-YES AND YOU?

-YES

-I LOVE YOU

-I LOVE YOU TOO

-I LOVE YOU VERY MUCH

-VERY MUCH?

-YES

-I LOVE YOU TOO

-DO YOU STILL LOVE ME

-YES AND YOU?

-YES

STEP ZERO: PERFORMING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Before focusing on the assumption that individuals execute performances in the context of a couple, it is necessary to define what it means to take the term performance out from the theater context, or the space of acting in general and place it in real life. It is important to agree that we will be looking at everyday life as a stage where we, individuals constantly perform. This idea is formed with key concepts defined by Ervin Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.¹ Here, I am paraphrasing Goffman's ideas in order to set the basic terms which we will be operating through and their definitions.

Society is constructed by individuals who meet once in a while. When at least two individuals are in the immediate physical presence of one another and influence each other's actions an interaction or an encounter is occurring. All the activity of a participant during an interaction which serves to influence in any way other participants can be considered as her performance. Consequently every performance of an individual involves other individuals in different positions. As the writer states, there might be the observers, the audience and the co-participants. There might be individuals that shift from one role to the other, for example someone could be first the observer and later on become a co-participant. Even the performer herself could shift into being an observer of her own performance. The pre-constructed pattern of action which is executed during a performance is called part or routine of the performer. When a performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions we notice that a social relationship is created. A social relationship is strongly connected to the social role of an individual or in other words the enactment of duties and rights attached to a given status. The social role of a performer involves parts that she presents to different audiences on various occasions. But what is the core, the purpose of the performer? What is it that makes her perform? There is the popular view that she offers her performance for the benefit of other people. Still, what if we try to look through her own point of view?

According to Goffman there are two possible relations a performer can have with her own performance. The first is that she is completely taken in by her own act, believing that the reality she stages is the real reality. Therefore if the audience is also convinced then only an outsider could have a doubt about the realness of the situation. The other possible situation is that the performer is not taken in at all by her own part. In this case she may attempt to establish the conviction of her audience only to serve other purposes, having no concern in the perception they have of her or of the situation. In a situation like this, where the performer does not believe in her own act and is not concerned about her audience's beliefs, she might be considered cynical. She might even be pleased by her ability to easily play with something that her audience takes seriously. However, the writer mentions a third situation where a cynical performer is not fooling the audience for her own purpose but because they do not allow her to be sincere. For example in the case of a shoe seller when a client cannot realize that the shoe that fits him the best is not in the size he thought he is wearing. The shoe seller then might give the client the shoe that fits him the best and tell him that it is the size that he would expect to wear.

1 The presentation of self in everyday life/Ervin Goffman/Edinburgh S/Monograph No. 2/1956

Reading Goffman's ideas got me thinking of power games between audience and performer. In most of the cases the performer appears to have more power than her spectators. Nevertheless, in cases like that of the cynical performer forced to lie to her audience I find that the spectators, however innocent might seem, are the true power holders. Like a marionette they move the performer to act as they want or need her to be. Imagine the situation of a family dinner, another place where you could be possibly expected to present the most honest version of yourself surrounded by the people that have known and loved you since the day you were born.

All these sound fantastic but why are there so many lies performed in this family dinner? The daughter that wants to study Theater but instead studies Maritime because her mother insists that having a bachelor on Shipping is necessary although they both know she would never work on it and even if she would, she could never be happy inside a shipping company. The mother who also wanted to study Arts but got convinced by her parents that Finance was a better option, working all her life in a job she found uninteresting and suppressing and marrying a man she never even felt attracted to just because it was time for her to get married. Nowadays, she keeps insulting him in front of others and never decides to divorce because maybe it is too late to find another partner. Maybe he is comfortable enough like an old couch and in times of crisis it is not wise to throw away old furniture. Next is the son that verbally reacts to their over controlling behavior but does not dare to do anything without their help and approval. Finally the father, who is aware of the whole situation but consciously decides to ignore it in order to keep the image of a happy united family untouched. Is this love? Is this intimacy? Is this honesty? Is this a family or a well written play?

Every time a new character sits at the table a new system of constantly multiplying relations establishes. Guests, cousins, grandparents, potential future husbands and wives. On the other hand when the number of characters on the table decreases the intensity of their performances seem to intensify. For example, when the two children leave the house for a few days and mother and father have to stay alone with each other. The mother's tendency to over control other people clashes with her feelings of disgust towards her husband. Does she choose over affection over total ignorance? Does she even attempt to combine those two towards her husband? Does he manage to oppress any possible negative reaction in order to maintain the calm looking surface of the relationship? Thinking about a comparison in theatrical terms, often a monologue performed by a single actress in a minimal setting manages to appear more complex and intense than a spectacular production with dozens of actors, pirates and carton elephants. As Tim Etchells concludes while comparing two ways of approaching a Shakespearean work, by miniaturizing the play and narrowing it down to its basic elements, the structure becomes more visible.²

Pulling back the monologue performed by a single actress outside the theatre context I arrive to an individual performing her everyday monologue on the stage of life. Eventually I come across a problem: The absence of a constant audience or a witness. In order to solve that problem the addition of just one more person seems crucial, a person loaded with the obligation of constantly observing her. That's what partners are all about, so here he is and here is a couple. A whole new universe of relations, power games, expectations and purposes has appeared the moment this

2 How to Frame On the Threshold of Performing and visual Arts/You are destroying everything I've built up!
Edited by B.Gronau, M. von Hartz, C.Hochleichter/Sternberg Press/Berlin/2016

couple comes to existence. Going back to Goffman's idea of a cynical performer forced to act because of her audience's needs, would it be valid to assume that the same situation applies in the relationship of a couple? Each one of the two individuals as a marionette to the hands of the other forced to perform according to what the other wants and needs. Indeed putting the other's needs as a priority is an effect of being in love. Still, I cannot ignore how similar this situation is to the doctor giving placebo pills to his patient. I cannot ignore the possibility of your partner not letting you be sincere. Her wanting him to be like someone she constructed in her imagination long before meeting him. Him compromising because once you become 30 being in a couple feels safer than being alone. In some cases before that too. People choosing to commit to relationships out of fear of being alone. I cannot ignore the possibility of being in a couple making one feel much more lonely than being alone. And one ignoring it because isn't it simple? Isn't Two always going to win over One?

While discussing this subject with others it came to my attention that theories around the performance of individuals in everyday life have a negative connotation. Especially for the ones currently in a relationship. The word performance relates to a conscious decision on how to behave. A partner in love is not expected to be constantly conscious of his acts, he is expected to be spontaneous and free. What I am trying to say is that probably for some, "performance" immediately translates into faking or pretending which opposes the romantic expectations we have of a relationship. It is hard to kill the magic for a minute, even harder to accept it has already been killed for a while. However, discussing with singles or with coupled individuals without their partner being present makes it easier to dive deeper into the subject.

Now let's apply the definition of a social relationship to the case of a couple of individuals supposedly sharing feelings of love or not love, probably passion or compassion. One performer "her" is repeatedly performing the act of reciting I love you to the same audience "him" on various occasions (at home, at the restaurant, in bed, in a holiday excursion). The definition seems to fit the case. Could this fact oppose the realness of the relationship? Is the space of a couple intruded by these performative rules or is it still the space where all rules do not apply anymore, where honesty and straight forwardness rule? Why does it feel a little awkward to analyze relationships on those terms? Why does it feel a little uncomfortable to theorize love?

STEP ONE: THE ACTING SPACES

On the stage called everyday life, a performer who performs no matter what her audience or the occasion is, forms around her an acting space involving certain elements. Speaking on theatrical terms: the necessary elements composing an acting space are the performer, the stage, the props, the backstage, the audience's space and the exit-entrance door separating the real from the theatrical. Every performer appearing on the stage forms her own unique acting space. Likewise, each key element existing in the couple's field forms an acting space worth naming and analyzing. Please give your warmest applause for the individual's acting space, the couple's acting space and the relationship's acting space:

The individual's acting space

All individuals, even before forming a couple, have formed their own acting space equally influenced by the environment where they live and personal characteristics that make them unique. The individual's acting space includes the stage, the backstage, the audience's place and an exit door separating the subjective world from "reality". I want to make clear that for me the word reality doesn't necessarily mean real or true. It represents the space on which the individual's subjectivity does not have any influence on. The place where I, my character and my habits do not matter. The stage appears in every occasion that the individual's performance is being witnessed by someone, therefore it strongly depends on the presence of an audience. Someone could argue that the stage can also appear in moments of self criticism or self examination where an individual becomes audience to her own self and I would agree on the validity of that thought. However, it is better to start from a simple situation where a stage is connected to a present external audience. The backstage, as in theater, is placed behind the curtains, the room where only actors are officially allowed. Contrary to theater where the path from stage to backstage is usually a straight line, in this situation it is an inwards walk. The backstage is placed at the individual's center, a room she sometimes visits too often and sometimes she ignores. There, the script is kept and props are standing together with the mirror. There, all preparations take place before she crosses the curtain. Allowing another individual to enter backstage is the biggest honor she could ever offer. However that honor can easily turn into a dangerous offer when she has not been taking care of her backstage for a long time. The exit door suffers the impossibility of the individual exiting through it, as her acting space is always moving together with her physical body. In other words, you can never escape yourself. I think.

HER: DO YOU WANT TO COME WITH ME BACKSTAGE?

HIM: AREN'T WE THERE ALREADY?

HER:

The couple's acting space

A couple consists of two individuals constantly performing to each other while constantly being each other's audience. The coexistence of two individuals resonates the coexistence of two acting spaces which share some common elements and differ in others. They share a common stage which never disappears since there is always a performer and a spectator present. They have two different backstages where each one goes separately in order to prepare their performance. Some partners might dare or be used to allowing the other to enter their backstages but that is not something I can take for granted for every couple around us. I could also think that getting into a routine of never allowing your partner to enter your backstage should be an important factor for breaking up but this is also not something I can take for granted. Although as mentioned above two partners are each other's constant audience, in case of a dinner at a restaurant, a meeting with parents or a walk in the park an external audience appears formed by all the people who either notice or carefully observe the couple. Each acting space has a personal exit door probably leading to a different reality. Even though none of the individuals can exit through their own door it is possible to exit through each other's door. In a few words, it is not possible to escape yourself but it might be possible to escape your partner. As the props (physical and verbal) seem endless, for now I will keep in mind the phrase I love you, a phrase that each individual is expected to recite often to her significant other.

In addition to the coexistence of two acting spaces, the coexistence of two partners forms a new space I'd like to call the couple's acting space. As mentioned above the couple's audience is anyone noticing or carefully observing them: parents, passengers, waiters, bus drivers, children, priests, neighbors, divorce lawyers, secret lovers, Facebook friends and psychoanalysts. The couple has a backstage filled with everything that no one except those two will witness or listen or know about. Their props include text messages, Christmas presents, fridge post-its, a shared house full of home appliances, the dishwasher, the tea pot, the big TV, a couch, their letters, the i-saw-this-and-i-thought-of-you-presents and bags with take away meals. The certain acts that all couples will eventually have to execute are written in an abstracted version of a script. The obvious acts are getting together and breaking up either by choice or by physical necessity (that's death). Others are: confessing personal secrets, revealing feelings, talking about the past, planning the future, going to a movie which one of the two dislikes, getting to know parents names, texting after midnight, having brunch, telling a small lie or telling a big lie. I wonder if saying I love you without being certain to its meaningfulness is a small lie or a big lie but I don't think I can get an answer to that. I also wouldn't know who to ask. Anyway, have you seen the exit door? From where I am standing I cannot see it. As mentioned earlier each partner can exit or escape the other but can they ever exit the couple? A profound answer could be breaking up, however I think that breaking up does not resonate exiting the couple since when it occurs the couple stops existing therefore the couple's acting space stops existing. Exiting temporarily means that when you decide to come back the space will still be there. Breaking up means breaking down the whole building named Couple. A secret love affair could be a possible way of exiting although it seems more to be a case of exiting your partner than

the couple itself. In a few words, you can sometimes escape your partner but you can never escape yourself or the fact that you are part of a couple. Attention! If we want to understand each other it is important to distinguish the couple from the relationship. They are two different things.

HIM: DO YOU SEE ME?

HER: I AM LEAVING

HIM: I'LL SEE YOU WHEN YOU SEE ME

The relationship's acting space

One might say that couple and relationship are too close to be separately analyzed as notions. I am thinking that their existence occurs in two different dimensions. The couple exists and expands in space. By getting apartments, cars, children, reserving tables in restaurants, buying furniture, laying in bed. On the other hand a relationship exists and expands in time. Starting to exist already when two people meet, like each other. Continues with someone doing a first step closer, when they kiss, sleep together, eat together. Goes on establishing the existence of a couple when they meet each other's friends, say I love you, live together, feel less and less passion, fight, break up, be in pain, cry, move on, meet new lovers, form new couples. One day, years later at a table with a friend one of the two ex partners is telling a friend the story of this relationship. There the relationship still exists and expands. The relationship exists and evolves before, during and long after the couple. Before it expands in imagination, during in personal perspective and after in memory. You see the couple was demolished long ago but the relationship is still standing, that is what makes them so different. I find it interesting to think how differently the two ex partners remember the relationship when the couple has broken apart. Which are the memories kept strong in their minds and which are erased? How would they describe it to a friend, a future lover, to themselves? What do they purposely forget? The best way for me to answer those questions is by looking at a personal example. But that's for later.

Consequently, one of the most important elements of a relationship's acting space is the audience. Audiences in general exist everywhere. During a family gathering, a post on social media, a phone call in the bus. Once again, one of the most interesting facts in the context of a couple is that each participant is simultaneously being a performer and an audience, an observer and a co-participant. How does this influence the power relation between the two? It could be a way to achieve being equal or a way to transform power into a jumping ball that constantly shifts from one's side of the field to the other's. Leaving it all to the judgement of who reacts faster or hits harder. In the context of a relationship where audiences also exist on different fragments of time it seems impossible for all participants to ever be looking at the exact same act. Even the performer is never the same through the passage of time and experience. She is so different that sometimes she does not recognize herself. Perhaps while assessing a past story through memory her present self has differentiated that much from her past self that she could easily detach the two and look at her past acts as an external audience. In a few words, you can never escape yourself but probably as you run in time and experience, yourself could sometimes be left behind and escape you. I think

HER: STOP STOP WAIT! MYSELF IS LEFT BEHIND.

Απάντηση

- Τι ζητάς από μένα;
- Την αγάπη σου.
- Τι αγάπη;
- Την αγάπη να σε κοιτάζω
χωρίς να ρώτας το γιατί.
Την αγάπη να κουβεντιάζω μαζί σου
χωρίς να ψαλλιδίζω
τα λόγια μου.
Την αγάπη να πιάνω το χέρι σου
χωρίς να τ'αποσύρεις σιγά ή απότομα.
Δικός και όχι ξένος.
Αυτό ζητώ.

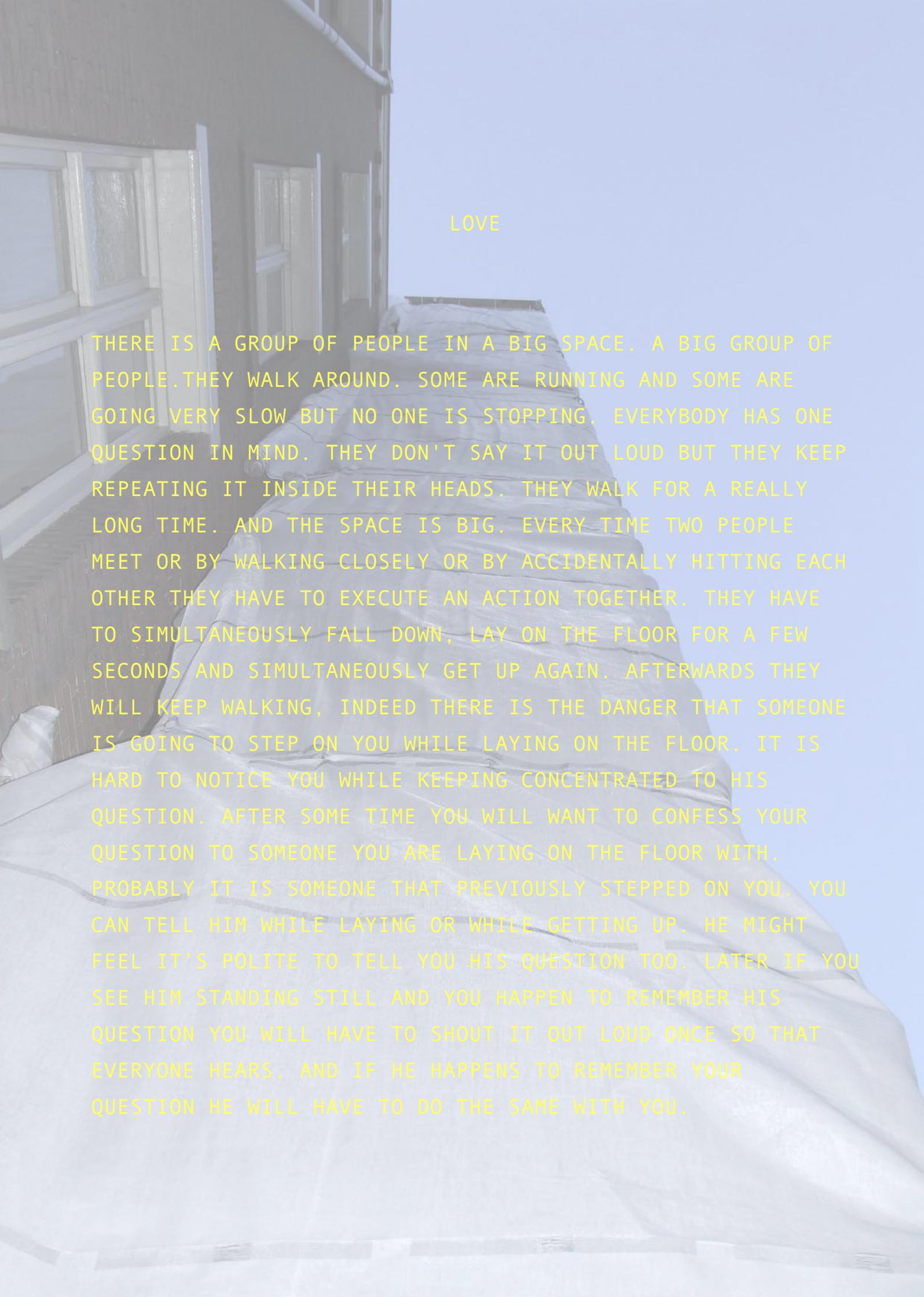
Γιάννης Μιχαλόπουλος (Ωρίων)

Response

- What do you want from me?
- Your love.
- What kind of love?
- The love of staring at you
without you asking why.
The love of talking with you
without cutting
my words.
The love of touching your hand
without you taking it away
slowly or abruptly.
Own and not stranger.
That's what I want.

Giannis Mihalopoulos (Orion)

This is a poem written by my uncle around 1979. He spent 26 years of his life fighting and being in exile. He was also writing poems. They were collected and published by his wife after his death.



LOVE

THERE IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE IN A BIG SPACE. A BIG GROUP OF PEOPLE. THEY WALK AROUND. SOME ARE RUNNING AND SOME ARE GOING VERY SLOW BUT NO ONE IS STOPPING. EVERYBODY HAS ONE QUESTION IN MIND. THEY DON'T SAY IT OUT LOUD BUT THEY KEEP REPEATING IT INSIDE THEIR HEADS. THEY WALK FOR A REALLY LONG TIME. AND THE SPACE IS BIG. EVERY TIME TWO PEOPLE MEET OR BY WALKING CLOSELY OR BY ACCIDENTALLY HITTING EACH OTHER THEY HAVE TO EXECUTE AN ACTION TOGETHER. THEY HAVE TO SIMULTANEOUSLY FALL DOWN, LAY ON THE FLOOR FOR A FEW SECONDS AND SIMULTANEOUSLY GET UP AGAIN. AFTERWARDS THEY WILL KEEP WALKING, INDEED THERE IS THE DANGER THAT SOMEONE IS GOING TO STEP ON YOU WHILE LAYING ON THE FLOOR. IT IS HARD TO NOTICE YOU WHILE KEEPING CONCENTRATED TO HIS QUESTION. AFTER SOME TIME YOU WILL WANT TO CONFESS YOUR QUESTION TO SOMEONE YOU ARE LAYING ON THE FLOOR WITH. PROBABLY IT IS SOMEONE THAT PREVIOUSLY STEPPED ON YOU. YOU CAN TELL HIM WHILE LAYING OR WHILE GETTING UP. HE MIGHT FEEL IT'S POLITE TO TELL YOU HIS QUESTION TOO. LATER IF YOU SEE HIM STANDING STILL AND YOU HAPPEN TO REMEMBER HIS QUESTION YOU WILL HAVE TO SHOUT IT OUT LOUD ONCE SO THAT EVERYONE HEARS. AND IF HE HAPPENS TO REMEMBER YOUR QUESTION HE WILL HAVE TO DO THE SAME WITH YOU.

STEP TWO: WHY WOULD YOU FORM A COUPLE ANYWAY?

According to Wikipedia, a couple consists of two people to whom each other is the significant other of the other. According to N. a couple is two people who have agreed to be named as a couple. According to K. a couple is 2 that have agreed to walk a straight line holding hands. According to E. a couple is a combination of agreements, retreats, food, sex and goodbyes. According to D. a couple is two people that love each other, you can be a couple and actually not be in a relationship. According to me ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS TWO. TWO PLUS TIME EQUALS LOVE OR NOT LOVE. But that is kind of irrelevant at the moment. For some that is irrelevant always. As far as I can see a couple is two people who share feelings of love or not love. Two people who share a certain or abstract past. Two people who live at the same present or one that lives in the future and one that lives in the past. In fact I am not sure that a couple is necessarily two people. It can be three people. And each one of them can have a different idea on how many people participate in this couple. You see, that is my problem with defining those notions. Every rule is accompanied by an exception. These notions are constructed by a series of exceptions that are sometimes exceptional and some times predictable. I cannot avoid the trap of words and their opposites. I cannot avoid even my opposites and that's probably the basic element defining my attempts to form a couple lately. However this story shouldn't be only about me and I want to make it clear now that we are still meeting that all these things I am going to tell you, I am not sure about and I cannot be sure about, I think nobody could. Why do we keep forming couples? This act is deeply painful, heartbreaking, certain to end while convincingly assuring you for its eternity. It is desperately egocentric and ridiculously self giving. Why why why?

Judith Butler claims that gender is “an identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts”.³ Accordingly, I believe that performativity in a couple arises through the establishment of a stylized repetition of acts. A couple would not exist without the continuous repetition of certain acts that indeed might differ from couple to couple. However once a couple establishes its own acts and the repetition starts it is impossible to maintain its existence without that repetition. You know what I mean? Butler mentions that gender transformation becomes possible by disturbing the subversive repetition of such acts. In a relationship transformation occurs when the repetition of patterned acts is disturbed. Maybe that is a way of escaping your partner as we were discussing before. Deciding not to participate in the repetition of your everyday habits.

Like this friend of mine, named E. Every time she would have a complain for her boyfriend she wouldn't tell him directly. Instead she chose to behave in the opposite way that she would normally behave. Then she would wait for him to notice that difference and ask her what is going on. Even then she wouldn't tell him. Instead she would decide to not reply or reply vaguely until he would get mad and they would start a fight. During that fight it was finally the time for E. to express her complain. Yes, after some years they broke up. But for sometime they were truly happy.

3 p.519/Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory/1988/The Johns Hopkins University Press

On the other hand the disruption of that stylized repetition can initiate by an external factor, like when a third individual eventually establishes a stylized repetition of acts with one of the two partners. Successful or not, that is the risk of a love affair. Still, usually the disruption derives from the couple's headquarters and sometimes not as consciously as in my friend's case. For example when your partner is busy enough to forget details on executing stylized acts. When you are not capable of performing the exact repetition of agreed acts anymore.

I do believe that it is possible for change to happen in the pattern of acts without destroying the relationship as long as this change is gradual and approved by both partners. As long as it is almost unnoticeable in the passage of time. But how commonly approved can it be without a conversation? Isn't this conversation already disturbing the relationship? The moment negative changes start popping out in the history of a couple, the chance is opening for transformation to occur. Imagine a polyphonic choir. During a concert one of the voices is accidentally popping out. For a spectator it becomes clear that the high pitched voice belongs to the blond girl on the second row. He starts noticing her, only her, her in relation to others, her expression, her mistakes. That makes it impossible for him to perceive the choir as one polyphonic entity again. The choir's center has fallen apart. Like these images that hide another image inside them and once you perceive the second image it is impossible to unsee it. Anyway I think you know what I mean by now. Possibly once you have seen your partners flaws either you have to love them as an addition to what you knew of him or you will react as an attempt to make them disappear. In any way it is not possible to escape the realness of your partner and go back to the idealized image you had of him, once you have seen his cracks.

I THOUGHT WE WERE DIFFERENT

TWO PEOPLE ARE WALKING. TWO PEOPLE ARE WALKING IN THE PARK. TWO PEOPLE ARE WALKING IN THE PARK THAT HAS A LAKE IN THE MIDDLE. TWO PEOPLE MEET. TWO PEOPLE WALK TOGETHER IN THE PARK THAT HAS A LAKE IN THE MIDDLE. TWO PEOPLE TALK. TWO PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE LAKE. TWO PEOPLE TALK FASTER AND FASTER ABOUT THE LAKE. TWO PEOPLE WALK FASTER AND FASTER. TWO PEOPLE WALK FASTER AND FASTER IN THE PARK THAT HAS A LAKE IN THE MIDDLE. TWO PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE LAKE WHILE WALKING AROUND THE LAKE. TWO PEOPLE RUN AROUND THE LAKE. TWO PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE LAKE WHILE RUNNING AROUND THE LAKE. TWO PEOPLE FORGET THEY RUN AROUND THE SAME LAKE FOR HOURS. TWO PEOPLE GET TIRED OF RUNNING. TWO PEOPLE CANNOT TALK BECAUSE OF THE RUNNING. TWO PEOPLE RUN AROUND THE LAKE AND CANNOT TALK BECAUSE OF THE RUNNING. TWO PEOPLE WALK SLOWER AND SLOWER. TWO PEOPLE REALIZE THEY WERE RUNNING AROUND THE SAME LAKE FOR HOURS. TWO PEOPLE DO NOT SEE THE POINT OF RUNNING AROUND THE SAME LAKE. TWO PEOPLE WALK ON A STRAIGHT LINE. TWO PEOPLE TRY TO TALK AS BEFORE BUT THE LAKE IS TOO FAR. TWO PEOPLE TALK ABOUT A STRAIGHT LINE. TWO PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT STRAIGHT LINES. TWO PEOPLE TALK ABOUT TREES. TWO PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT TREES. TWO PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE ANYTHING TO TALK ABOUT. TWO PEOPLE KEEP SILENT. TWO SILENT PEOPLE ARRIVE ON A CROSSROAD. TWO SILENT PEOPLE COULD TALK ABOUT CROSSROADS. TWO PEOPLE DON'T FIND TALKING ABOUT CROSSROADS EXCITING. TWO PEOPLE SPLIT ON THE CROSSROAD.

**STEP THREE: I LOVE YOU, I DON'T LOVE YOU.
THE RELATIONSHIP BEFORE AND AFTER THAT.**

In the movie I watched yesterday the top scene was when the cold-hearted protagonist kneeled and said to the fragile, heartbroken girl I love you. She cried and said I love you too and there were fireworks and kisses and happily ever after. When I told you I love you there were no tears and you didn't say I love you too and there were no fireworks nor a happily ever after. Instead you carefully picked a selection of the worse things to say and the worse things to do and performed it for me. But I don't want to talk only about what happened on the first minutes after I love you. I would like to understand why reciting this phrase is such a turning point in a relationship. Why it is equally influential to the possible birth of Jesus in human history. As we have B.C. and A.D. we should also have B.ILY and A.ILY.

B.ILY: There is mystery, there is doubt, there is game. Does she love me? Is she gonna say it first? Who is the strongest? Who will dare? Who has been hurt before? How to make her say it? Shall I say it? What if she doesn't say it back? Shall I show it instead of saying it? Words don't matter anyway, shall I write it? Scripta manent, yes I had latin in school. No, no no I can't hold it no more. But why doesn't he say it already? I mean men should say it first right? And women have to say I love you too. Because women are fragile and men cold-hearted. But in our case he is fragile and I am distant so who should say it first?

A.ILY: Shiiiiiiiit I said it. One two three. Say it back. 4-5: what is this silence? 6-7-8: come on it's easy say it back. 9: four words just say it back. 10-11 ok alright at least say something 12: or just hug me? 13: no no don't hug me what am I a cat? 14: did you even hear me? 15-16: do I have to say it again? 17: seriously look at me 18-19: shit shit shit why did I say it? 20: I hate you.

Do you remember how we talked about power being a jumping ball moving from one's side to the other's? Well, when I said I love you I hit the ball to your side and I was waiting for it but it didn't come back. Game over. Win is yours.

THE OTHER DAY YOU WERE BORED TO CROSS THE CORRIDOR TO GO PEE SO I TOLD YOU THAT YOU COULD PEE IN THE SINK IF YOU WANTED. YOU THOUGHT ABOUT IT FOR A MINUTE OR TWO AND YOU SAID THANKS BUT NO. AFTERWARDS I TOLD YOU THAT I LOVE YOU VERY MUCH. YOU THOUGHT ABOUT IT FOR A MINUTE OR TWO AND YOU MIGHT HAVE NOT SAID IT BUT I HEARD A THANKS BUT NO. NOW I'M THINKING FOR A MINUTE OR TWO WHICH ONE OF THE TWO I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID, NO?

Wait. Stop. I think we need to take it easy for a little while

Before moving to the next step I would like to tell you something that could seem a little introductory. While writing this essay my selection of sources was sometimes odd. Research material might not be the most profoundly fitting. I haven't gone deep into some important academic texts focused on performativity, gender and fiction. I haven't focused on works coming from the space of contemporary visual arts. I chose to inertly discuss with individuals inhabiting worlds very close but yet apart to mine. Like Sarah Kane from the world of poetry. Or Etta James and Nina Simone from the world of music. Pina Bausch from the world of dance theater and R.Scheener from the world of theater analysis. Early in my research I got intrigued by material I encountered almost accidentally. A book picked out from the library because of its color. A song heard on the radio. A picture standing on my wall for months already. Starting a dialogue with them seemed more pleasurable. I hope you understand that having the couple as a subject makes it impossible to ignore pleasure. Thinking about what lead me to that way of researching the following metaphor was created:

“Imagine you are single for some time. You do feel the need to find a partner. Your friends who are not single at the moment have noticed both facts. They think of friends of their friends that could fit you. They want to fix you up with someone that is into the things you like. The same interest in performing arts. The same kind of music. You meet and have long conversations with them. However in those conversations you find no excitement. There is no click as my best friend used to say. Simultaneously at work you meet a person doing many things you would never see yourself doing. Wait. I am not trying to tell you that opposites attract each other. He is not your opposite. He is just looking at the world in an alien way to your perspective. You do not discuss deeply your interests and he doesn't seem to know a lot about the things that keep you busy. He talks about things you never found interesting. Like female handball (no offense). However you both like a lot a very specific thing. Like a drink. You both like gin tonic. While drinking gin tonic together you share a truly great time. He is definitely a click. It is hard to describe to your friends why you feel so comfortable with such a person. You sometimes observe yourself in his presence, not able to spot elements of your character your best friends find crucial. But while talking with him you develop and get inspired about sections of your life never shared in the conversation. Meaning that while he talks about female handball you make realizations about performativity in couples. Your thoughts develop further than when with this guy that saw this performance of a real couple breaking up on stage. I couldn't say how long this will last but I do believe it is important to invest in it.”

This is at least what I tried to do in my research by investing in paradoxical sources. One of them is L.B.Cebik's book. I picked it out from the humanities university library because it was green and because I liked that the word truth was in the title. That day I was visiting the library with my gin tonic guy.(should I skip that?) I could not resist starting a dialogue with Mr Cebik. Cheers to the next step.

**STEP FOUR: IS REAL LIFE INSPIRED BY FICTION OR DOES FICTION
SET THE IDEALS FOR OUR PERSONAL LIFE?**

(A dialogue between L.B.Cebik's text from "Fictional Narratives and Truth" An Epistemic Analysis, and myself)

CEBIK

A legal fiction is the assumption of something possible as fact without regard for its truth or falsity...Work which contains nothing imaginary may be history, science, detection, biography but not fiction.

ME

In the after life of a relationship where two ex lovers are reciting the story of their break up each from their own perspective and those two perspectives appear to be very different. Can they both be considered fiction? Are they both true? Isn't memory a way of fictionalizing events?

CEBIK

The important feature of fictional discourse is that, as we are not being informed about anything that really exists we cannot be said to be misinformed either.

ME

Memory is informing us about things that did exist strongly influenced by personal perception. Can memory ever misinform?

CEBIK

I describe nothing real therefore I cannot misdescribe anything. Being unable to dispute a description makes it impossible to succeed or to fail when attempting to do with things that need a reference like characterize, evaluating, etc..

ME

Sometimes conversations occur under the silent agreement of "I know that you know". Meaning that if I am talking about a lover to someone that doesn't know him but knows me well, I can shortly describe him by saying

he is Italian, 30 years old etc. The person I am talking to probably knows the type of people I am usually attracted to, also might know what Italian, 30 years old, etc. resonates to, also might know how this story ended already from the beginning or might be influenced by my voice's tone or my face's expression. All those side elements are very informative on the story while being on the line of fiction and reality. Who can say if I am misdescribing or not?

CEBIK

Fiction is a linguistic convention about reference, namely, that to call X a fiction is to indicate that the words and sentences in these linguistic products are not used to refer to the real world.

ME

When we talk about our being in previous relationships specifically about periods when we were in love, it feels like sometimes we are describing ourselves as being on a different, undefinable state. As if we are excusing our character's actions back then due to our being under the effect of love or under the spell of our partner. No?

CEBIK

Is there such a beast as literary truth and if so, what is it? Are there truths in literature, truths which literature either presents or conveys to us, truths which we may derive or infer from literature?

ME

In the case of couples and relationships, does reality set the example for fiction to be inspired, or does fiction set our standard for what an ideal relationship is, or a successful couple should be? Drama, intense passion, imaginative sexual life, kissing in the rain all those things just might not happen, how is a relationship assessed?

CEBIK

Sir Phillip Sydney (defense of Poesie) sought to defend poetry from Puritan attack by making it the supreme form of teaching the ideal. Poets do not affirm, they create a better world, and they communicate it with delightful and pleasurable means that move readers to imitate the ideal.

ME

Is a better world necessarily a poetic world? Is the ideal that far from reality? What about the texts of Sarah Kane? The monologue from Crave. Is this reality or the fictional ideal?

“And I want to play hide-and-seek and give you my clothes and tell you I like your shoes and sit on the steps while you take a bath and massage your neck and kiss your feet and hold your hand and go for a meal and not mind when you eat my food and meet you at Rudy’s and talk about the day and type your letters and carry your boxes and laugh at your paranoia and give you tapes you don’t listen to and watch great films and watch terrible films and complain about the radio and take pictures of you when you’re sleeping and get up to fetch you coffee and bagels and Danish and go to Florent and drink coffee at midnight and have you steal my cigarettes and never be able to find a match and tell you about the programme I saw the night before and take you to the eye hospital and not laugh at your jokes and want you in the morning but let you sleep for a while and kiss your back and stroke your skin and tell you how much I love your hair your eyes your lips your neck your breasts your arse your

and sit on the steps smoking till your neighbour comes home and sit on the steps smoking till you come home and worry when you’re late and be amazed when you’re early and give you sunflowers and go to your party and dance till I’m black and be sorry when I’m wrong and happy when you forgive me and look at your photos and wish I’d known you forever and hear your voice in my ear and feel your skin on my skin and get scared when you’re angry and your eye has gone red and the other eye blue and your hair to the left and your face oriental and tell you you’re gorgeous and hug you when you’re anxious and hold you when you hurt and want you when I smell you and offend you when I touch you and whimper when I’m next to you and whimper when I’m not and dribble on your breast and smother you in the night and get cold when you take the blanket and hot when you don’t and melt when you smile and dissolve when you laugh and not understand why you think I’m rejecting you when I’m not rejecting you and wonder how you could think I’d ever reject you and wonder who you are but accept you anyway and tell you about the tree angel enchanted forest boy who flew across the ocean because he loved you and write poems for you and wonder why you don’t believe me and have a feeling so deep I can’t find words for it and want to buy you a kitten I’d get jealous of because it would get more attention than me and keep you in bed when you have to go and cry like a baby when you finally do and get rid of the roaches and buy you presents you don’t want and take them away again and ask you to marry me and you say no again but keep on asking because though you think I don’t mean it I do always have from the first time I asked you and wander the city thinking it’s empty without you and want want you want and think I’m losing myself but know I’m safe with you and tell you the worst of me and try to give you the best of me because you don’t deserve any less and answer your questions when I’d rather not and tell you the truth when I really don’t want to and try to be honest because I know you prefer it and think it’s all over but hang on in for just ten more minutes before you throw me out of your life and forget who I am and try to get closer to you because it’s a beautiful learning to know you and well worth the effort and speak German to you badly and Hebrew to you worse and make love with you at three in the morning and somehow somehow somehow communicate some of the overwhelming undying overpowering unconditional all-encompassing heart-enriching mind-expanding on-going never-ending love I have for you.”

CEBIK

We use language in fiction to create, to originate, to perform. In short the language of fictional narrative is performative.

ME

When you say I love you too because you have to or because you are used to or because you used to mean it but now you are not sure anymore, in fact you don't even check if you still mean it or not, you just say it because you are expected to. Is this fictional language, is it performative?

CEBIK

Because we make commitments through the labels we apply, we sometimes feel the need to create bridging categories with mixed commitments, categories such as the historical novel..

ME

What about a secret love affair as a bridge between commitment and freedom?

P.S. What the fuck am I saying?

STEP FIVE: PERSONAL STORIES

Some films claim to represent reality. In Eric Rohmer's Six Moral Tales for example we can see a series of characters involved in love dilemmas and relationship crossroads. Those six films are character-based, meaning that we see how the character decides what he does. We are allowed to see his thought process. These films serve as mirrors through which we can reflect back on our lives, question our actions, wonder if we should change the way we are operating. Still, even films that succeed to arrive very close to reality and real questions achieve to leave a taste of the ideal. They present a full circle where the characters wander, meet, question, wonder, decide, act accordingly, experience the consequences and being lead to an end after which the spectator is left with the certainty of the character's fictional immortality.

In real life some things do not ever finish for all participants. They leave traumas, memories, brain squats, heart traces or in a more capitalist language "unfinished business". The ideal probably has to do with the absence of consequences experienced by characters participating in the relationship. How different are our relationships from cinema relationships? Do we want to be like them? Do we assess our relationships according to cinematic criteria? In the case of a passionate encounter for example. When you have seen Kim Basinger having sex with that guy in those outdoors steps under heavy rain and they don't care that their clothes are getting wet or if someone passes by, can you still look at an ordinary bedroom intercourse with the same eye? Or when a break up happens after a long, polite conversation and not after a loud fight where you and your partner are throwing objects to each other, cry, have sex, cry again, throw objects again, one leaves running from the house and never comes back again. Do you think that those two break ups reveal the same intensity? Where are the movies about the guy that never looks back at you, never never until the end or the girl that has seen your Facebook message and hasn't replied in a month? About the moment when you finally kiss the person you have been flirting with for a long time but you saliva just don't feel good together? About the day that your enthusiasm for somebody has faded out, is just not there anymore, not because of a dramatic event but out of habit, out of time. Inhale, exhale, gone. How much passion is enough for a successful relationship and what are the criteria for it? Those exact questions bring up the performativity in couples. If the ideal passion is something more than what we find in our relationships the necessity to bring it on can appear. To become more exciting, to do crazier things. The moment that while kissing you are thinking of what Kim Basinger did and he is thinking of what Mickey Rourke did, you are both performing.

Trying to understand and explain notions I know I have experienced for me Only becomes possible by looking back at the moments that these notions were experienced. It always triggered me how personal you can get in an art work, how personal you can get in a thesis, if it is better to generalize your concepts than tell all the true details on what and why and how. Please don't confuse personal with tragic, I am not talking about a very tragic moment of my life, more about a very very personal, like how a sexual intercourse can lead to the end of a relationship or how my boyfriend and I broke up. Let's talk about that.

Dear A.

I wrote a short text of 500 words reporting what happened on the day we broke up. It actually starts on the evening before, when you came straight from the airport to my house. The whole text is written in first person, as if I am talking to you. It is a combination of describing the actual facts but also my feelings about them. I think it would be great if you would write a text reporting what happened on that day as well. The only restriction I would like to give you is to write it in first person, as if you are talking to me. And to start from the moment you came in my room straight from the airport until we sat for breakfast the day after our breakup, (when we were making the lists -what my daddy should do and what my boyfriend should do,- remember?) Just to give you a small hint of my text, it starts like this:

"On the 31st of December 2015 around 8 o'clock you came in my room straight from the airport. I was looking at you for a few minutes and I couldn't recognize your face..."

Probably now you are already angry at me for not remembering your face, but I hope you still want to write the text.
Baci baci

Antrianna

BREAKING UP WITH YOU ON THE FIRST OF JANUARY 2016

On the 31st of December 2015 around 8 o'clock you came in my room straight from the airport. I was looking at you for a few minutes and I couldn't recognize your face. I was hugging you but I couldn't recognize you. On the first of January we broke up after a fight because of the printer that I asked you to carry home with me. We were already fighting for some time but it was pretty clear that the printer was not the reason but just an excuse to fight. I REALLY DON'T WANT TO WRITE THIS. The night before on new year's eve we had the worse intercourse we ever had. I did it without really wanting to do it at that moment and you got very disappointed at me. You told me to never do this again. And I apologized many times. I really meant it, I'm sorry. The day after I had to work, and you went around by yourself. We met around 11 and started walking to my friend's place. I still hadn't recognize your face. And you kept asking me if I had recognized you (but I didn't want to say it because no matter if I was recognizing you or not I loved you very much. I still love you very much) I DON'T WANT TO WRITE THIS. When we arrived everybody was behaving like we were the perfect couple. My friends always liked you very much but that night even my friend's parents liked you very much. Maybe we didn't like each other very much that night. So I asked you if you can help me carry that big printer home. You said yes but not with a lot of excitement. I was pissing you off. This is how the fight started. So after fighting and fighting and "let's do that no let's do that" we started walking you, me and the huge printer but you were right it was too big and we kept fighting and carrying that huge printer until I decided that we should take a taxi and we fought a little more about it and a little bit about capitalism and in the end we got a taxi we got home, I carried the printer four floors up myself because you had also pissed me off and I wanted to look brave and strong until we laid on the bed. Without the printer. We kept fighting until we stopped because we both wondered why the fuck are we fighting all this time? And we talked about it and talked and talked and all this talking lead to the conclusion that we should break up. I thought that this dialogue should definitely become a performance but I didn't want to tell you because I thought you would be angry or that you would make fun of me, so I didn't say anything and you said then that I should definitely make a performance out of this dialogue so I thought again why the fuck are we fighting I love you you love me why do we break up? We did. A year passed and I still wonder. And I still think this should be a performance.

YOU BREAKING UP WITH ME ON THE FIRST OF JANUARY 2016

I arrived at your home in the evening, the whole city was decked for the new year evening and I felt so happy despite my sadness: I was expecting yourself at the bus station but as many other broken promises this did not happen. You were wearing an amaranth dress and I was so excited to see you but you could not recognize myself so I had to spend ten minutes telling that it was me and not anybody else. We had a really nice evening, your house looked so great but when at end of the night we had sex I understood that you were thinking of somebody/ something else; it was really painful. The day after you had something better to do, so I was alone again, and when you finished to work you asked me to go to a friend's of yours house in which you had the pleasure to stay with other people of course and maybe with me as well. When we went home something happened, something stupid or something that I removed from my head; I guess that night we broke up and, If I am not wrong, the day after your went to work again (I guess now you earn one billion dollars) and I stayed alone or maybe went to a friend house or maybe our for a drink; I can't remember. The only thing still impressed in my mind is my way back to Lisbon; nobody came with me to the airport or to the bus station and I felt immensely sad. But It doesn't really matter, I can't blame yourself; maybe you could not recognize me for real or maybe somebody else came in your bed and you, with your innocence, thought: wow this is my boyfriend.
Happy new year.

OUR FICTIONAL BREAK UP ON THE FIRST OF JANUARY
2016

What our break up would be like if it was in a movie?
What is the idealized, the perfect-ised, the distant, the fictionalized version?

They hadn't seen each other for three months already. They were both looking forward to that day. He found his way from the airport while she was preparing dinner at home. When he entered her room there was a moment of stillness before they melted into each others arms. She kept looking at his face. She couldn't recognize him. He kept asking her why. They felt like strangers for a little while. The moment was interrupted by their friend arriving for the new year's eve celebration. Very late that night or very early next morning, they were alone again. Finding themselves into intense kissing. But something, something was holding them back. Something or someone in her mind was holding her back. Someone else than him. He was furious. -Why are you doing this to me? -I am so sorry. -Never do this to me again. -I am so sorry. Next day he was alone again, she had to work. He wondered around the city trapped between happiness and misery for something that was about to be lost. She wondered around the restaurant with the feeling of a rock inside her stomach. That night they met and after a completely nonsense fight full of insults they sensibly decided to break up. To finish this relationship before it finishes itself. One moment it was making sense the next moment they where both crying. One moment he was telling her how immature, how awful she is next moment how he loves her more than any woman before. One moment she was telling how many things she wants to do before settling down, because that's what she felt forced to do with him, the next moment she knew that he is much better than everyone coming after. They did have sex that night. It was passionate. It was great. They wondered again for a little bit why they had broken up. They couldn't find a rational explanation so they went back to things easier to define. Like jobs and future plans and capitalism and participatory art.

STEP SIX: OBSERVING COUPLES

I am a waitress. I serve in restaurants which serve as microcosms through which it becomes possible to observe the bigger world. All kinds of relationships and power relations are present there. Client-waitress, client-other client, young couples, families, tinder dates, colleagues, professional meetings, elderly couples, bored couples, couples in love, colleague couples, colleague love affairs, ex partners with new partners, single friends, singles eating alone, teenagers eating out for the first time, regulars, grumpy regulars, waiters that make you laugh, extremely tired waiters, clients that love to complain, waiters that want to impress, partners that want to impress, famous Dutch clients. The same norms of behavior tend to come back until they become noticeable. I feel strange for describing what I observe instead of trying to formulate theories around my subject. I believe that though my observations, we together could achieve a level of common understanding, a level of I know-that you know-that-this-means-that. Since I do not often manage to formulate a theory maybe I shouldn't choose to write about this subject. I could keep the observations just for myself. On the other hand I think that phrasing an observation is the first step to analyze your subject of interest. Theoretical texts sometimes get trapped in the restrictions of meanings of words. Theories are constructed by words that mean something. Observations are constructed by words that show something. On my first year of Fine Arts studies we had classes based on looking at each other's work and giving feedback within a group. Very often there was a long silence before the group would start giving feedback. In order to help the situation my teacher would say: Ok guys, let's just describe what we see. This is what I see:

A. Couple

They are regulars. They come every Saturday and sometimes an extra time a week. They always reserve a table some days in advance. Always like to sit on the same table. They slowly enter. We greet with the same excitement, as if they were not expected. They hang their coats and walk to the table. Every time showing the same surprise that we reserved their favorite table. Entering and sitting on the table is a process that takes a few minutes. They are both around 80. Both walking slow. She has a small shake while she moves. He is more steady. She seems weak. He seems to be ready to catch her while falling but simultaneously hiding it to not make her feel incapable. On the table we have already placed some tap water, an empty wine glass for her own 0 alcohol wine and his 0 alcohol beer. Still they seem surprised as if they were not expecting it. Sometimes I wonder if they really had not expected it, if they forgot, if they think I forget. Straight after they sit, they place their ordinary objects on the table. A sudoku and a pen for her, an electronic book for him. Afterwards they read the menu for a few minutes, they have been reading

the menu for 15 years already. Most of the times she orders the same things. Vitello tonnato as a starter, another starter as main course and the brownie as dessert. I already know what she is going to order but every time I wait for her to say it. I like the way she orders. Searching for some seconds to spot the dish, pronouncing the names slowly while pointing at it on the menu with her finger slightly shaking. When she finishes she always turns her head on an unexpected angle and looks at me. He tries to order something different though there are some dishes he likes to come back to. When I bring her plate she gives them an excited look. When he sees his dishes he counts them, lifts his eye brows a little and smiles. When they are done with the mains, I bring them the dessert card. For her it is again the same procedure, searching for the brownie on the menu, pointing at it with her finger slightly shaking while saying I would like to have the homemade brownie. He is ordering a different dish. When it's time for them to leave they slowly take their objects from the table, stand up and he comes to pay while she is grabbing her coat. I ask if everything was good. He says very nice. We might chat a little while he is paying. Then she is coming to the counter while he goes to take his coat. I ask her if everything was good. She says that it is always a pleasure to be here. He arrives again. They bow their heads as an agreement that it is time to walk out. We say goodnight and see you next time. They smile. We smile. And they slowly walk out the door. They are my favorite couple.

At first I thought I would tell you about many couples I've been serving. The ones that always make us make them something that is not on the menu, the ones that always split everything they take in two and more and more and more. But. You know? I think after telling you about the A. Couple I am pretty full.

LAST STEP: HAPPY ENDING?

Love is a losing game. Love me or leave. Love will tear us apart again. Loving you. Love me do. It must have been love but it's over now. I love you more than you will ever know. To know him is to love him. Love is all you need. All my loving. Love for sale. You don't know what love is. To love somebody. Just say I love him. I love to love. Love me now. Let's fall in love. Love me or die. Born to love. I was born to love you. Let me love you. Love to love you baby. Love you like a love song. Why I love you. I love you. So in love. Crazy in love. I love my man. My man don't love me. There's a limit to your love. Love came here. Life begins when you're in love. Love happened here. You're my playground love. Lover, lover. Love. L.O.V.E. Love is here to stay. I've got my love to keep me warm. I can't believe that you're in love with me. I can't give you anything but love. The end of a love affair. Love hurts. P.S. I love you.

What I mean is that love is a subject almost everyone is trying to approach at some point. I tried to do it through the lens of the couple, asking if we are honest or if we are constantly performing. My conclusion for now is that yes, we are constantly performing. And that's ok, as long as it makes us happy.

P.S. Could I ever get more cheesy?

P.S.2: Thank you to every one around that willingly shared their personal stories with me and sorry I never gave a “solution”. I believed there was no problem to begin with.

P.S.3: When I told my father that I dedicated my thesis to his divorce with my mother he said: “I think that a divorce is the biggest failure a person can achieve. So you dedicate your thesis to your parents’ biggest failure?”

P.S.4: My mother on the other hand just nodded in an I-know-what-you-mean way.

P.S.5: There is no ideal way to end this. Bye.

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Amadou et Mariam

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Mother

Father

Brother

Grandmother

Grandfather

The other Grandmother

The other Grandfather

Aunt

Aunt's husband

Classmates in relationship

Teachers in relationship

Single teachers

Regular couples in the restaurant

Single colleagues

Couple kissing on the street

Couple not kissing anymore

First love

First boyfriend

Best boyfriend

A.P.

N.K.

E.K.

D.B.

K.S.

S.G.

C.M.

K.M.

you that read this till the end
and the eternal complexity of human relationships.

To my parents' divorce for sure.



PERFORMATIVITY IN COUPLES
ANTRIANNA MOUTOULA
BA THESIS
FINE ARTS
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE
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