

A Conversation with Michael Hardt on the Politics of Love

Leonard Schwartz

If Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* remains a master text for our own mythmaking, as a section of the following conversation with philosopher Michael Hardt asserts, then it also follows that the relationship between speech and writing remains particularly fraught. Since speech as cure is the most basic assumption of Freudian psychoanalysis, and writing—well, writing is many things for Freud and for the rest of us, but surely most of those things are troublesome—then there is an implicit risk in making over speech as text. Writing is the sign of a problem with speech, a problem that speech could not solve for itself, be it a quandary of memory, of authority, of self-reflection, or of an increasing complexity that frustrates speech, for which language as text becomes the objectification and sign. (Socrates, the other end of the spectrum in the discussion concerning Eros that follows, famously refused to write, seeing speech as the vehicle of truth and writing as its loss.)

The psychic sublimations and repressions required in order to write need no review here, though the temptation to remind oneself that Moses wanted us to worship the Writing on the Tablets he had brought, and that Freud asks us repeatedly to reflect on Moses, and that Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* dramatizes for us both the failures of speech (Moses' speech impediment, Schoenberg's idea of *Sprechgesang* in lieu of full throated song) and of Commandments to sway any crowd the way image, sound and light can sway us—that is a temptation that proves irresistible. Freud and Martin Buber, who also comes up in the conversation, came from Vienna, one of the great café cultures of its time, in which, as in all great café cultures, speech is virtually deified. I want to say then that speech, conversation, or dialogue are where we need to turn our attention, since it is where our own culture fails us: Starbucks is not the sign of a great café culture, to say the least. The reigning models of conversation, from talk radio to NPR, offer bombast and sterility as our major and minor modes of address. When Holly Melgard and I transcribed the Hardt talk we wanted to maintain its conversational moment, but also clear away a certain stumbling (on my part of course), so that the reader wouldn't have to stumble with me. Just as the reign of radio mandates the clearing away of most fascicles, the reign of writing clears away one's own disarticulations. In speech, we must struggle through the valley of the letter "u," as in "um," or "um" again or "uh," and "uh" again, starting from one high point (the impulse to speak), descending down that slightly curved line into the gut, umbilicus, or underground universe at the bottom of "u," then rising back up again to the peak on the other side of the letter, in what we have brightly said or written, after risking that very inarticulate. "U" and "V" do that to you, "V" especially, as the concept of love as a political concept discussed here demonstrates.

Speech, more speech, speech offered to speech, with its stumbles and bright spots is, I recognize, the *raison d'être* for *Cross Cultural Poetics*, the radio program I've done for five years, interviewing various poets, translators, editors, playwrights, musicians, and philosophers. (Speaking of speech, I don't think "Spoken Word," with all the contempt it heaps on writing, is the answer either, since Spoken Word is never or rarely a spoken word at all, but a highly elevated, highly conventionalized form of address that seems little connected to what one might actually speak, and mostly a monologue at that. Writing seems closer to speech than does Spoken Word.) From whence the transcript of the conversation with Michael Hardt, a conversation now untethered from whatever dramatic circumstance might have originally tied it to speech. Is it a radical political act to have a conversation, when internet and other media dependent on writing or image or both, occupy so much of our time, along with commerce itself? A quote from Freud's text: "The aggressive instinct is the derivative and the main representative of the death instinct which we have found alongside of Eros, and which shares world dominion with it. And now, I think, the meaning of the evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species. And it is this battle of the giants that our nurse-maids try to appease with their lullaby about Heaven." If song qua lullaby is music cleansed of any encounter between two actual beings, infantilizing us, then conversation, still musical but also between beings both actual and imaginary, is the sign of Eros in its mildest sublimation, teetering on its potentially happy, potentially disastrous desublimation.

Michael Hardt's recent writings deal primarily with the political, legal, economic, and social aspects of globalization. In his books with Antonio Negri he has analyzed the functioning of the current global power structure (Empire, 2000) and the possible democratic alternatives to that structure (Multitude, 2004). He is a professor of English at Duke University.

LS: You've said that you're interested currently in *love* as a political concept. I wondered if you could say a little bit about that, especially since in *Multitude* (your last book), it does come up. I was speaking with the political theorist Steve Niva who pointed out that it is very clearly there in your piece—in the beginning of the book about the golem. And then, toward the end of *Multitude*, a passage which reads as follows:

People today seem unable to understand love as a political concept, but a concept of love is just what we need to grasp the constituent power of the multitude. The modern concept of love is almost exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family. Love has become a strictly private affair. We need a more generous and more unrestrained conception of love.

Could you comment on that passage and on the direction your thinking has gone since then?

MH: In part it starts with a recognition that in certain political actions, in certain political demonstrations—the really good ones—you do have a feeling of something really like love. And so, it's partly a way of trying to theorize that recognition of this feeling of...let's call it a "collective transformation" that one experiences in certain kinds of political action. And therefore, to think about *love*, love which I do understand to be precisely a transformative power, something in which we come out different. And to try to think of it as a political concept. There are ways in which love has functioned as a political concept, more than it does today. In fact, when one starts talking about love as a political concept, it's hard to avoid religious traditions. Certainly in Judaic and Christian traditions, love has often been deployed as a political concept, as the construction of the community, precisely. And it seems to me that today, as in the passage you read, that partly through the "segregation" or "confinement" of love into love of the same, love within the family, or even extending further, love of the race. Love of the neighbor was thought of as a restrictive category, let's say. Love of those like yourself has destroyed the possibility of love as a more generous and positive political concept. That's one way thing that has happened. It's the political possibility of love that has been destroyed.

LS: You do bring up the question of the relationship between the form of love that you're theorizing and attempting to describe, and love defined in a religious context. You speak in the *Multitude* of a concept of the new martyrdom (which would be love), but I don't think that is the same as love as a form of sacrifice or the way in which love is worked into a martyrology and sacrificial vocabulary and thought process in religion. I guess I'm asking if you could say a little bit

more about how you differentiate between that which you are in the process of articulating, and the religious concept of love we have in the West.

MH: I think that once one starts thinking about love as a political concept it is a dangerous terrain. It is a terrain on which there are many horrible consequences. And I guess I would say that there are many different ways love functions as a political concept, and that some of them can lead to quite horrible ends...as I think you're suggesting with the question. I think we have to differentiate between, in one sense "love of the same," "love of the race," let's say "love of the neighbor"—which can be thought of as the same, which can function in a certain kind of nationalism, in certain kinds of religious fundamentalism, and also in which involve exclusion of others—and a different notion of love which is the kind of political concept which seems to me we need to create, which is *not* a "love of the same" but in fact a "love of the different," a "love of the stranger." It's hard for me not to repeat certain biblical contexts on this, because I think that within the Judaic and Christian traditions there are a lot of alternatives.

LS: Sure.

MH: But at least that seems to be one division that might be helpful here. On the one hand we have a political notion of love as "love of the same," which functions as a kind of racism, a kind of nationalism, etc., and it does involve love it seems to me. It's important to think of it that way. But, it's horrible. It's "love gone bad," let's say. Whereas, we can think of using that as a caution or a warning: a political notion of love that is not only open to difference—like not only a kind of tolerance, but a love that loves the stranger, a love that functions through the play of differences, rather than the insistence on the same. There's a second criterion one might add to that. As you can tell...this is something I'm still in the process of figuring out, so one gets partial formulation of this. It seems to me there's also a horrible form of "love gone bad," in which love is thought of as a merging into one. We get this in Hollywood romances and in romantic poetry, which is when two become one in love. It seems to me to be a horrible idea—both at the level of personal relationships, but also politically. I think rather love has to be thought of as a proliferation of differences, not the destruction of differences. Not merging into unity, but a constructing of constellations among differences, among social differences. Like I was saying when we were talking about religious fundamentalism, we can see the need for thinking about racial differences, the recognition of others, etc. That's another way of distinguishing between love as a political concept that might function democratically, that might work toward a democratic politics, and other ways in which love functions as a political concept, that goes quite wrong. That is a way of thinking about certain kinds of fascism, racialist, nationalist, etc.

LS: I was thinking of Martin Buber who writes and speaks of the love of the stranger. Out of his concept of I/Thou, or on the basis of his concepts that the address between the I to the You springs his notion of a bi-national state that would be Israel and Palestine in one. That was always his argument, that it had to be a single state solution, that it had to be one state that would incorporate the stranger, be that stranger Jewish or Arab, into a single state. I wondered if Buber

is an influence, or someone you're reading. You know, *Multitude* does begin or nearly begin with that image of the golem, the golem is haunting us, drawing directly out of various currents in Jewish mysticism that are not identical to Buber, but certainly related. That section in your book ends with:

Perhaps what monsters like the golem are trying to teach us, whispering to us secretly under the din of our global battlefield, is a lesson about the monstrosity of war and our possible redemption through love.

Could you say a little bit about that story of the golem, and why you began your book with it?

MH: On a strictly anecdotal note: my co-author Toni Negri and I, in the kind of games that co-authors play with each other, we had felt frustrated in retrospect that in *Empire* (the previous book), we had used a whole series of Christian theological references. And so, in writing *Multitude*, we thought "well ok, this time we should have all Jewish theological references." And so we started it as a game that certain kinds of writers play, at least. I'm sure you feel this way, there are certain kinds of constraints that end up being very productive. That's where we started, and so the idea would be then in another book, we would have to have all Islamic references, which is at the moment a little beyond my level of understanding. So we started that way, and it's true that you were referring to Buber and there are a number of authors within the twentieth century Jewish theological tradition who insist on alterity, who insist on that notion of difference as fundamental to any effaceable system. You described it really beautifully too. I think that is something I'm trying to think here. You know, in any number of discussions about difference in political terms, that seems to me to be a very important and operative framework. About the golem: the golem seemed to me a myth of love frustrated and love gone horribly wrong. It seemed to me a kind of cautionary tale like the kinds of things I was just recounting to you, which is that there are certain ways in which we should read these tremendously evil political developments: fascisms, nationalisms, racisms, certain sorts of political fundamentalisms—as forms of love. I mean, I think that they do involve a kind of love. Everyone always talks about them in terms of their hatred, which is of course true too, but I don't think there's really a contradiction between love and hate. What I think is really fundamental to them is there's a kind of "love of the same," "love of the race," and that's what leads so horribly wrong in them. I guess I'm trying to say that the golem was one way of trying to start thinking about this caution about the evils that can result from love gone bad. Therefore, the need to think of the kinds of distinctions, or say, criteria for what would constitute a positive, or productive, or really democratic form of love as politics.... In a way, starting from there, starting from that caution that you read, it was almost a need or mandate to think further about what would flesh out the notion of "love as politics" in what way of distinguishing that from these quite horrible forms of love as politics.

LS: The golem is traditionally a man made of clay, brought to life by a ritual performed by a rabbi. Golem literally means "unformed or amorphous matter," and its animation repeats, according to the ancient mystical tradition of the Kabala,

the process of the God's creation of the world recounted in Genesis. And of course, as you were saying, in most myths or legends of the golem, it goes terribly wrong and the creation turns against its creator, or the creation is misused by its creator, depending how we read it. When you chose to ground the book in passages from Jewish theology, you described that as part of a constraint based form of writing. What are the implications? In what ways do you think that shapes the book as the constraint usually does shape the direction that the thought moves?

MH: That was the idea. I think that we weren't as successful as I would have hoped, in the sense of having that consistent reference pervade the thinking. But I think that this particular constraint is one (at least this is what I had in mind) about thinking alterity, of thinking of the notion of difference, or even just thinking the stranger, hospitality. These sorts of concepts seem to me essential to thinking of political movements and political philosophy today. In a way, it guards against thinking of politics as a kind of unification, as the construction of identity that excludes those that are different. There were those constraints or those reminders in thinking about the possibilities for politics and democracy in this age of globalization. That's what I was hoping would be the effect of the constraint.

LS: If I could put another figure in front of you, I would say from the twentieth century Jewish mystical tradition...it would be Freud. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in that famous passage, in which he describes the couple in love as the most subversive form of energy available, in that the couple in love need no other, more sublimated union, or form of identification: be it tribal, or ethnic, or nationalistic, or universalist. It's the intensity of that intertwining—not necessarily union—but intertwining that marks that out as potentially destructive of the existing order to the extent that the two don't need any third or fourth or fifth or multitude at that point. I wonder if you could say a little bit about your critique of that notion of Freud. Is that identical to the Hollywood union or the pop song union that of course we're all encircled by? Or, is there something else going on, do you think, in that notion of the sublimated and the "unsublimated"?

MH: Right. No, that's quite brilliant, and I've found—actually you've pinpointed this quite perfectly—in trying to think about this, in trying to think about love as a political concept, I find myself constantly having to struggle with religious theology on the one hand, and psychoanalysis on the other. They're the two boundaries. And it seems ironical for me, because I neither believe in God or the unconscious. I'm not sure which one is a greater violation of some scriptures. In any case, you're right. My first thing to say would be that I think that Freud is not able to think about love outside of the couple or outside of the family. It always comes back to the father, or it always comes back to some primal scene that involves Mommy, Daddy, and Me. That said though, it's true (as you're suggesting) that there is never anything simple in that relationship. There's nothing identical in that relationship that Freud is talking about in love between the couple. There are always—and this is the helpful thing, at least from my way of thinking—an enormous number of other useful things in Freud's thought and psychoanalysis in general, but here in reminding us of the non-identical nature

of the way in which there's always multiple meanings in every drive, or desire, or relationship, so that one has to think then of the multiplicity in the relationship. There's nothing purely identical in one's feelings in love. What I would like though—this is the operation that I hope to do—with using the kinds of insights of Freud or psychoanalysis, try to expand them beyond the confines of the familial scene so that we can think further. It seems to me necessary in order to think politically of moving beyond that. It seems to me that Freud always thinks that forms of love that are outside this libido sublimated or frustrated, that the following of the leader is essentially following the father, etc. And so, I think that we need to move outside of that, in order to think of love as a political concept.

LS: In *Multitude* you write:

We need to recover today this material and political sense of love, a love as strong as death. This does not mean that you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child. It only means that your love does not end there, that love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and the construction of a new society. Without this love, we are nothing.

If we look at that passage: are you moving on now to a critique of it? When you say, "this does not mean you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child," obviously we can imagine, or we know of positions from which you can't. From a Leninist position that would look at marriage as turning the other into property, from a certain feminist perspective, we can analyze marriage that way as well. You say that, "this does not mean you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child." So I'm just asking if you could go a little further into the way in which that is a box that you state in the book, but also OK.

MH: That's great. What I would say is: in a way, love has been destroyed as a political concept. This is a further one, other than what we were talking about before: the personal and political levels of it, or Eros and what's often called Agape, are separated or segregated, so that the "love of the spouse," the "love of the child" that functions on that level of Eros, is separated from the level of "love of the people," which belongs, like you say, to a certain ascetic socialist and communist tradition that's very priestly in that way: refusing the level of Eros and only insisting on this level of Agape, which translates in these political terms into a "love of the people." It seems to me that in order to think of love as a political concept, we have to think it simultaneously as both, that recognizes the connection between and continuum between that level of the personal and the political. The terms don't exactly work here, but at least that is the first way of thinking about it.

LS: Are deployments of the concept of Eros earlier than Freud useful for you in terms of your account of or construction of the political idea of love?

MH: They are.... It's complicated.... This is my own philosophical training that's stopping me from speaking at the moment, because when one thinks "Eros," first one thinks about Plato writing about love using the term "Eros," and then about Freud, and they are of course not identical, those two. The way Eros has come to

be used most commonly today is primarily in that intimate either familial scene or the scene of spousal coupling, which is segregated from the political. That is exactly what seems to me to be the problem. If Eros could be attached to what would need not deny those energies and let's say, "we need to be revolutionaries in the way in which we care about each other," or something like that. You can imagine the absurd caricatures of that, which unfortunately in some ways, in certain times, have been somewhat true. So, it's not to deny that level of the personal attachment of the love we have for each other, the love we have for those immediately around us, in order to love the people in some abstract sense...but neither to limit love to that scene of the personal, and in a way, discount it from politics by saying, "oh well that's just the personal." It seems to me not an easy operation, but one that's necessary in order to do this, is to think of the two together: the love of those around you and the love of the people. It's both concrete, therefore, and abstract at the same time. I'm not sure if this is making much sense. I at least see it as the problem that one has to confront.

LS: In *Multitude* you do offer a number of examples. In this passage you write:

We need to invent new weapons for democracy today. There are indeed numerous creative attempts to find new weapons. Consider, for example, as an experiment with new weapons, the kiss-ins conducted by Queer Nation in which men would kiss men and women women in a public place to shock people who are homophobic, which was the case in the Queer Nation action held at a Mormon convention in Utah. The various forms of carnival and mimicry that are so common today at globalization protests might be considered another form of weaponry.

So, obviously in terms of the task of writing here to align love with weapons seems, on the one hand, a kind of shocking opposition—though, I guess, we do have Cupid with those arrows and so on, in the tradition. So, I shouldn't be so shocked...

MH: (*Laughs*)

LS: You cite kiss-ins at demonstrations by Queer Nation.

MH: Right. In these kinds of political discussions, it's always difficult giving examples (or not always), but often the examples seem to deflate the argument, if you know what I mean.

LS: Yes indeed! (*Laughs*)

MH: It's necessary, but then they seem to bring it down to something very specific that doesn't apply to other things. Those do seem to me to be good examples of struggling against certain norms: of heteronormativity, of certain social structures that prevent love from functioning as a political concept. I think you're right also to point out that once one thinks that love is a political concept, one cannot think love as opposed to or outside of violence. I think that it necessarily involves a certain kind of violence; often a violence against what hinders its

actions. It's difficult to give a sufficiently general example of what that would mean: a kind of love that acts through violence. For those who do think in terms of religious scriptures—the Judaic and Christian traditions are full of that—are full of love that requires a violence in order to defend itself, in order to continue as action. I don't mean by this at all that we should either repeat scriptural actions or that we should take the scriptures as models for living, but at least the reference to them sometimes helps because it can denaturalize the current assumptions. For instance, in this case, the assumption that love would never involve any sorts of violence.

LS: There are two things I want to say. One, maybe the most concrete thing we could say, or maybe the most concrete thing I could ask would be: What do you see as the primary barriers that prevent us from actualizing this love?

MH: We've been talking about some that are very important and quotidian, you know, that have to do with everyday life. One attempts to talk about the kinds of practices that do struggle against love that expands beyond the family. This is the way I understand a lot of either what goes under the labels of queer theory or queer practice. Even certain practices of say, gay male cruising that was common in the 1980's, or certain theorizations of that, which I think are trying to struggle against, break the limitations of a certain necessity for love to be confined within the couple. That seems to me to be extremely important on one level of thinking. On another much more important level of thinking, it would probably be better to return to the contexts that you posed earlier, with respect to the golem. One thing that prohibits us from loving the stranger—from enacting the kind of politics that is based on love in a much more general expansive way—is precisely the regimes of violence in the world and those proscriptions for division that prohibit us, that not only make it dangerous, but make it impossible for us to form a politics constructed through love in this way.

LS: The context or *contact*, I should say, between the concept of violence and the concept of love on the one hand, and opposition on the other is, I think, also there in *Multitude* when you write about two different forms of martyrdom:

The one form, which is exemplified by the suicide bomber, poses martyrdom as a response of destruction, including self-destruction, to an act of injustice. The other form of martyrdom, however, is completely different. In this form the martyr does not seek destruction but is rather struck down by the violence of the powerful. Martyrdom in this form is really a kind of *testimony*—testimony not so much to the injustices of power but to the possibility of a new world, an alternative not only to that specific destructive power but to every such power. The entire republican tradition from the heroes of Plutarch to Martin Luther is based on this second form or martyrdom. This martyrdom is really an act of love; a constituent act aimed at the future against the sovereignty of the present.

I wonder if you could take us through that passage a little bit—in terms of the concept of martyrdom you're describing.

MH: It's nice the way you do these things, because sometimes when you repeat things to me, they sound a little bit more coherent than they did before I heard them.

LS: When I read passages from your book?

MH: Yeah, it's nice.

LS: That's great. I'm glad to be able to provide you that coherence! (*Shared laughs*)

MH: I think you're right, that what's at stake in this...there are a couple different things that are at stake. The one is that there is one form of martyrdom, the former one, which is not aimed at constructing anything. It has a certain glorifying nobility in that willingness to die in order to document an injustice. I think from the perspective of the martyr, it functions that way. But the second kind of martyrdom is different in the sense that it's striving to construct a different kind of world, and its martyrdom is not in any way intended, it is a consequence, it is a *risk* that is taken in trying to construct a different world. It is struck down precisely by the forces that don't allow that change to take place. I remember Toni and I, when we were thinking about this, we were making lists for ourselves of all the different historical figures that are considered martyrs, and putting them on one side or the other. In a sense, what we are also doing in a way is protesting against that former type of martyrdom. It seems too often now the martyr has only been relegated to that former figure. We're forgetting there's the sort of figures of martyrdom which were, in a way, bearing testimony, in a way, to a future world, because that's what they were struggling for. They were only struck down in the process before that could be achieved. They're both, I suppose, testimonies—but ones that are pointed in different directions.

LS: So that figure of the martyr is there. I don't think you've set it up as the only possibility that the person who pursues or embodies the form of love you're articulating necessarily ends up martyred—although it is future tense at the end of the book. You say, "This will be the real political act of love." It is something that is, I wouldn't say messianic—although you say there's a Jewish theological kind of weave in the book—but it's still something we're anticipating. This *will* be the real political act of love. Yes?

MH: Yes. I mean it just seems useful to recognize that there are many instances of democracy in the world or attempts toward democracy in the world, but we've not yet achieved it. There's a strong relationship between this act of love as politics, and the coming of democracy for the first time.

LS: I have long thought that the real problem with Christianity is that it hasn't happened yet, and I wonder if that is also part of what's being articulated in your book. But Michael, I want to ask you a question about composition and about the way you work as a writer. I know you're in process on new work. Anything—without interfering with that process—you can tell us about what form your reflections and actions on love are going to take in the new book with Negri?

MH: I think that actually in the book he and I are writing together, love will probably again have a rather limited role. A number of things I have been writing about have been separate from the collaboration...

LS: I see.

MH: We go through different phases, as I think any writer does. A previous phase we felt was very important was to try to write in such a way as to engage a larger public and speak in a vocabulary and in a mode of discourse of writing that would be accessible to more people. At the moment, we're in a different phase. We're very much wanting to write for ourselves. Not that we want to be incomprehensible or something, but there are certain problems that we are anxious to work out, and the writing process is the means of doing that. We're trying to give ourselves just the freedom to write just the way we speak to each other...if that makes sense.

LS: Absolutely. And love? Are those essays you're working on, or talks?

MH: It's taken mostly the form of the talks now partly because it's a topic that is not yet written because I'm not yet sure how to resolve it, in a way. It is an open question that I don't feel yet ready for. On the other hand, it is a wonderful way to engage people with love, because it is something that doesn't require special knowledge—or in fact there are so many special knowledges that come to bear on it, that everyone has a way of entering into the question. So, I've found it a really wonderful way to open it as a discussion with different kinds of groups. As you can imagine, activists—especially a young generation of activists—I find very appealing, and I find already very natural in a way to talk about political organization and love. In fact, more so than I would say than political activists of my own generation—those in their twenties rather than in their forties let's say. And on the other hand, academics who of course get a little bit squirmy when I start talking about love, because it feels sentimental, it's not quite...it's the thing that poets ought to talk about, and not political philosophers.

LS: Yeah, what are you trying to do, take it away from us?

MH: (*Laughs*) But then, once one works through the ideas a little bit, it's embedded in so many of the scholarly fields that people are working on today, that it becomes a very fruitful discussion—and fruitful for me in particular. I guess this is the selfish part of choosing a topic for lectures: it is something that gives me a lot...

LS: That's the passion of it to pursue as a philosopher with a love of knowledge and so on. And of course one thinks of, you know, constructing the terms that then can be known in the world. So, when we kidded about stealing something from poetry, that makes some sense, right, to think of the act of creating the object that then can be understood or known. The philosophical or poetic functions form a *couple* in order to accomplish this kind of writing. Don't you think?

MH: Absolutely. And I mean there are long poetic traditions of using the romantic couple as metaphor for the poetic process, and recognizing love as a way of thinking of the process of construction that poetry is. I was thinking of Dante and the Provençal traditions—thinking of romantic love as an analogy of the poetic process itself.

LS: That is a rich source to draw from. The poet Robin Blaser certainly draws deeply from Dante in order to construct a notion of a possible public world, on the basis of a notion of love.

MH: You're right that I should think more about contemporary poets in this regard, because I think that that would be very helpful.

LS: I think that you would find it in the work of Robin Blaser in particular. In his book *The Holy Forest*, his notion of the private as the privy, reduced to the privy, or we're all in a certain kind of privy and the public world that is made accessible or possible through something that he is drawing out of Dante, I would say. So, I was just struck by that reference that you made. As far as a book from you on love goes, we're going to have to anticipate it, is that right?

MH: I think so.

LS: Thank you so much Michael and let's speak soon.

MH: Great.

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