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Love has more than one name

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'Close your eyes and I'll kiss you, tomorrow I'll miss you...' – these words open one of the most famous love songs in the world. It comes from the early repertoire of the Beatles and lasts just over two minutes. Legend has it that Paul McCartney wrote it while shaving. The lyrics have the form of a goodbye message to a dear person. The chorus is like a magical incantation for the time of parting and longing:

'All my loving I will send to you;

All my loving, darling I'll be true...'

After almost a half-century, the rollicking version of the song by four beaux with mop-top haircuts has at last been rivalled by a sensual female cover by Amy Winehouse. Her *All my loving* lasts an entire minute longer and makes us realise that the lyrics have not 'lost it' since 1963. We still want to love and kiss the dearest eyes, we want to be loved and kissed by loving lips, we crave for declarations of faithfulness and sincerity of feeling, and we dread parting and longing. Even if today we do not wait for letters but rather for e-mails and text messages, love, which fills the lyrics of this and many other songs, as well as all the emotions that usually accompany it, does not make us feel surprised or embarrassed, it does not provoke any extra thoughts or deliberations. We may even risk the statement that love is like air – equally vital for life. And it is equally transparent – invisible to the eye, obvious.

But perhaps the obviousness is only illusory. When Paul McCartney first hummed *All my loving* while shaving, Erich Fromm's *Art of Loving* had already been around for 7 years. Soaked with humanism and care for the future of the world, Fromm's essay about the art of love regards the skill of loving – oneself, people, children, relatives, God – as equal to any other skill, the mastering of which requires our will, patience, concentration and persistence. Who treats love in this way? Most of us seek love in order to feel loved, not to love others. What is more, as the author notices, 'people think that loving is a simple thing, whereas finding the right person to love or winning somebody's feelings is not.' This widespread conviction is, in fact, as naive as faith that the only thing one must do in order to pass a driving test is to find a proper car. Nevertheless, persistent search for the perfect partner is in fact justified by the laws of... the free market. Fromm already knew it back in the 1950s. 'Two people fall in love

with each other when they feel they have found the best mate on the market, taking into consideration mutual benefits.’ Contemporary scientific reports, linking love to a specific cocktail of hormones produced by our brains, are equally disheartening.

It seems that at the beginning of the third millennium, humans – who after all are sentient beings – are adapting to the role of consumers of life, thoughts, emotions (and hormones). Contemporary slaves of credit cards, electronic gadgets and parallel worlds (TV or computer screens), we live in a reality governed by more and more common rules, similar to those from the *Brave New World* of Aldous Huxley, which seemed new and brave only at a first glance at the cover... Why are the lyrics of *All my loving*, and – for that matter – of other, far more tearful love songs, so touching, then? What is the source of this mysterious longing, hidden just underneath the mask of our narcissistic and rather flippant attitude, for the so-called ‘true love’, for authenticity of experience and constancy of feeling? We may risk a hypothesis that just as a brave new world may seem superficial and brittle to us, the lack of reflection and mindlessness may, paradoxically, turn out to be similarly illusory, as in fact it is just the mask for general helplessness. It may be a kind of a defence mechanism of *homo sapiens*, who do think and feel – who desire real, not prefabricated, feelings. We are conscious of the risk of solitude, despair, loss, and, in the end, inevitable and incomprehensible death. Despite everything that our civilisation has achieved, we still live unaware of where we came from, who we are and where we are headed. Once, mortal fear of passing was soothed by faith in God, whose name would start with a capital letter. Currently, in the rationalist world in which science and technology steadily eliminate religion and spirituality from the centre of life as symptoms of embarrassing obscurantism, faith in love seems to be the most common form of faith. Those who do not believe should try a small experiment with friends: saying in public that one does not believe in love will evoke much more fervent reactions and protests than stating that one is an atheist.

Hence, if love not only seems to be as vital to life as air, but also perfect in the role of opiate for the masses, it should be given more of our attention. What is individually qualitative in our experiencing of family and partner love and what is merely an issue of simple animal instincts or artificially driven group needs? What is love in relation to sex? What is the difference between what the heart feels and the simple mechanisms of consumption? What is left when greenhouse roses and Valentine’s Day hearts fade? Such questions can be made as numerous as the innumerable faces of love. Ancient Greeks, always eager for the splitting of hairs, distinguished at least four types of love: altruistic and general (Agape), fraternal and family (Philia), creative and inspired by staying with the loved person (Eros) and sensual love (Sexus). Beautiful Narcissus, mesmerised by his own reflection, was a symbol of the futility of being in love with oneself, which only became popular in our egocentric times. Meanwhile, various forms of relations and feelings between people have evolved over the centuries just like all forms of social movements, art and literary currents, or current fashion did. It is worth remembering that marriage, as a foundation of relations between a woman and a man, became legally settled in Europe only in 1563 during the Council of Trent. The marriage was not a relationship with an equal basis, though. In the patriarchal system, a wife depends on her husband, whereas children are treated as property and a condition for the continuation of lineage. Traditionally, in a class-based society, the main reason for creating a family is affiliation to a given social group – marriage are arranged, an heiress to the throne marries a prince, a daughter of a craftsman marries the oldest apprentice of her father. Love in a married couple is possible, of course, over time, but

it is not a necessary condition for having a relationship or a happy family life. Let us add that traditional marriages, arranged mainly by the elders of both families, are still common in many parts of the world. They scare the supporters of romantic love, who seem to forget that what they advocate is, as its name suggests, quite a recent development which, to put it gently, has not been thoroughly tested yet.

Indeed, Romanticism revolutionised the stabilised social life. Against bourgeois ideals, love between two people – free of any conventions – became recognised as the highest value in human life, a guarantee of creative freedom and the promise of true happiness. Soon, Freud added harmony of bodies to the harmony of souls, and sexuality has been getting more and more important in social relations since the beginning of the 20th century. Its significance can be even seen in the meaning of the word 'intercourse,' which today is understood as a sexual act. At the same time, the effects of the struggle for equal rights for women, ethnic and sexual minorities, which started in mid-19th century, are increasingly felt in our societal and interpersonal relationships. Women fight not only for the right to vote and to have their own account in a bank – they also fight for the right to choose and change their partner, to voice different sexual needs or the will to fully satisfy them. Homosexual couples fight for the same rights as heterosexual ones, including expressing feelings in public, as well as making a family and raising children. This revolution has taken place only in the last few decades and is still controversial. Yet can we risk an assumption that what really drives all of this is a deep human need for love in its entire spectrum, starting with the right to look for it, and ending with its right to be respected when it has been found? Conclusions are obvious – on the one hand, all of these changes lead to overvaluation of the so-far dominant distribution of powers between the sexes in favour of the still unstable pattern of new values, such as happiness and self-fulfilment, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or colour of skin. On the other hand, an undeniable advantage of the situation is a chance for construction of our own system of values, as well as for an amazingly frank, if compared to previous centuries, dialogue between human beings of both sexes and of different cultural traditions. It is a chance which should not be disregarded, even if it involves exhausting efforts aimed at understanding changes which happen inside and outside of us.

It is worth mentioning that we have new, energetic allies in these efforts. After ages of the domination of the static written word, an era of the triumph of dynamically changing images has come. Among a number of visual arts, there is one which, owing to the development of technology and accessibility to various systems, allows for doing art 'at home'. Since its (not so distant) beginning, photography has accompanied the changing image of the world and relations between its inhabitants. At the same time, its history is also a record of creating a new order in society and redefinition of the social place of artists, women, ethnic and sexual minorities, whereas the abovementioned need for faith in love and the desire to satisfy it appears to be a powerful culture-creating factor. It is no accident that the iconography of the 20th century is based on a series of images which are inspired by love – from the passionate kiss of Paris pedestrians, captured by Robert Doisneau, to the legendary photo of naked John Lennon hugging Yoko Ono, taken by Annie Leibovitz. If we add the courage of such artists as Nan Goldin or Sophie Calle, who did not hesitate to draw from their own experience and romantic failures, we will get a polyphonic landscape of a new, not yet stabilised, reality.

How inspiring, then, to have a new opportunity to reflect on love in all its varied aspects. Taking *All my lovin'* as a motto, this chance was given by the organisers of this edition of Fotofestival in Łódź, in cooperation with the Irish Sirius Arts Center and Kunstlerhaus Bethanien of Berlin. The festival invites both photographers and the audience to reflect on the nature of intimate human relations in the 21st century. The artists who take part in the event form a colourful, international group of individualities. Their backgrounds are as diverse as their aesthetic choices. And yet, there is a common, but ambiguous, denominator of the selected artists and their works: it is a search for an answer to an apparently simple question about the nature of love and its meaning to the feeling and thinking *homo sapiens*.

Because love really has more than one name. Even if we simplify the thing and make an initial assumption that at the beginning we are interested only in parental love, it is still obvious that there is a difference between the gaze of Madonna-like fathers, who are portrayed in a pool with their children, treating water as an excuse for such closeness (Alex ten Napel), and the gaze of same-sex couples, often surrounded by a bunch of kids, portrayed in a form which pervasively refers to pictorialism and portraits of the 19th-century bourgeoisie (Verena Jaekel). A totally different message is conveyed by a series of self-portraits of an elderly beauty with an ever flowering youngster, in whom we recognize the infant from the first frame (Carole Benitah), and by a series of photos where an angelic head of a daughter replaces her mother's (Edith Maybin). On the other hand, the next generation also grabs cameras. They are equally fascinated with their own maturing and increasing independence from the adults as with the fragility of the same people on whom their world once depended. Muireann Brady documents precisely the disorientation of an adult child who has suddenly moved in with her aging parents. Lucia Stráňaiová portrays her grandparents in the most touching way: she depicts their bodies, closeness and silence – full of expression and tension. Elinor Carucci uses the *Closer* series to show intimate portraits of three generations: there is a place for sensual love of lovers, as well as for disarming family tenderness. A large format camera of Lydia Panas captured entire families, whose faces say a lot about hidden discomfort and growing conflicts. Is it true that it is only in photos that we get along with our families?... Doug DuBois has already published his family photos. They were created as a result of his father's accident, which left the old man broken and in need of painful rehabilitation. These family photos could be a part of history for each and any of us. Their brilliant simplicity allows for an expression of human intimacy without overt exhibitionism. A deeper meaning of son's love is expressed in the photos by Phil Toledano, who was taking care of his aging father, suffering from short term memory loss, and in the photos by Marcin Studziński, who passionately photographed his newly rediscovered father, not suspecting his oncoming death. The same feelings are evoked by the images by Jenny Matthews, in which victims of war pose with portraits of lost relatives in their hands.

Moreover, we will find here attempts to be more objective in relation to the common search for love and closeness to another human being. A Renaissance figure of Igor Savchenko of Minsk (engineer, cybernetics graduate, diver, author of revolutionary texts about the meaninglessness of photography and series of poetic titles of non-existing images) attracts our attention with his universal *Alphabet of gestures*, made with the precision of an engineer. Rebecca Martinez focused on the fashion for dolls which imitate infants – these amazing rubber dolls are something more than simply a disturbing gadget; in fact, they are a harbinger of the emergence of longing for

unconditional love, which manifests itself among modern singles in the form of a sudden need for parenthood. Meanwhile, the sublime, stylised photographs by Yolanda del Amo constitute an archipelago of co-existing lonelines: instead of closeness, there is distance; instead of a two-way dialogue, silence; instead of tenderness – two separate beds and two open laptops. Couples who are bored with each other (spied upon by Martin Parr) no longer hide their boredom: he is reading, she is sleeping. He is feeding the baby, she is looking through the window. He is in a sterile kitchen, she is in an empty room, leaning against cardboard boxes, ready to move. The divorce is handled by their lawyers. Welcome to the world of singles, focused on self-fulfilment and the satisfying one's own needs – chronically unable to love. And chronically desiring it, as a matter of fact. It is enough to look around, go to the cinema, turn on the radio and listen to the lyrics.

Let us get back to Fromm, whose evaluation of the influence of the social structure of western civilisation on the development of love is clearly negative – 'no neutral observer of our life in the West can doubt that fraternal, maternal or erotic love is a rather rare phenomenon, and that its place will be taken by various forms of pseudo-love, which, in fact, are only forms of breaking it.' A fact: how many fulfilled individuals, successful relationships and happy families do we know?... Emotionally mature people – able to love another person – are exceptions in our present system. True love, even though it is an essential thing, has become a rarity. That is why 'those who seriously consider love as the only solution to the problem of human existence have to reach the conclusion that if love is to become a social phenomenon, and not individual or marginal, our social structure has to undergo serious and radical changes' – such is Erich Fromm's summary of his reflections on the art of love in 1956. In 2010, the International Festival of Photography in Łódź, with its *All my lovin'* motto, gives us an opportunity not only to verify these insights but, above all, allows for personal reflection upon the name and nature of love. Will our answers prove satisfying?

translation: Translateria / Dominic Leppla

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