AN INTERVIEW WITH ARNOLD
ON THE TOPIC OF LOVE LETTERS

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INTRODUCED by
DANIYYEL IRONSIDE

What follows is the transcript of an interview which occurred on 27/06/2026.
The transcript has been edited for the purposes of concision and readability.

INTRODUCTION

The Love Letter as War Machine

"To place thought in an immediate relation with the outside, with the forces of the outside, in short to make thought a war machine, is a strange undertaking [...] The problem of the war machine is that of relaying [...] The necessity of not having control over language, of being a foreigner in one's own tongue, in order to draw speech to oneself and "bring something incomprehensible into the world." Such is the form of exteriority, the relation between brother and sister, the becoming-woman of the thinker, the becoming-thought of the woman: the *Gemut* that refuses to be controlled, that forms a war machine. A thought grappling with exterior forces instead of being gathered up in an interior form, operating by relays instead of forming an image; an event-thought, a haecceity, instead of a subject-thought, a problem-thought instead of an essence-thought or theorem; a thought that appeals to a people instead of taking itself for a government ministry."

Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*

In my conversation with Arnold, that romance which gilds the love letter is tarnished and tested. I am cautious that - introducing the dialogue in this way - I might obscure the subtle optimism underlying Arnold's view. However, it is not his sparse concessions to normative ideas (or platonic ideals) which most impressed upon me. Emerging from our discussion, and lingering with me for the past few months, is an idea which I had not previously considered. I don't mean to suggest that this is Arnold's idea. But even if he would prefer a [critical] distance from it (and I have no reason to believe he would), this articulation of the love letter is meant to provoke or activate the interview by which it was inspired.

The love letter ought not to be codified, lest it surrender that relationality which – across our relative distances – affects intimacy. When a love letter is touching, it is because it carries something of the common affection shared between two; from that co-affection comes expressions both of their being different, and their becoming together. Whether shared memories, fantasies, or feelings, the patchwork of quotation which weaves their love is exactly that fabric from which their letter should be drawn. In this way, the love letter's composition is emergent of those processes and paralogies which articulate love itself; love here distinct from the formal relationships it subtends.

Romantic relationships are built through the consolidation of flows of desire; as acts of love repeat and accumulate, these flows stabilise into circuits, their repetition made dependable, even expected. The risk in any relationship is that these codes effect a sense of closure – desire cannot make new connections, cannot evolve, cannot become-with the otherness proper I or Other as such. Relationships, as systems of codification, tend toward inertia. Saying so is not to cast any aspersions – that stability lends partnerships their resilience. But love is sublime exactly because it exceeds (or overwhelms) our capacity to understand and anticipate it; the love letter is an expression of that radicality.

It is in this way that the love letter is opposed to formalization and might then take on the function of a war machine. However, even to say that is to take up the logic of structuration itself. Relationality insists beyond the limits of abstract codification and is radical to it *in essentia*. Which is not to suggest the love letter cannot invoke the formal, appropriating its language and structure as a motif or refrain. Nor does it mean, obviously, that the love letter is a device deployed for the purpose of destruction. Rather, it's composition is expressive of those relational processes which structuration channels and regulates. The war machine has conflict only as a secondary function, effected as radical flows are coerced into subordination by organisational codes.

This might be made legible, for example, as love's disjunction with the expectations of normative relationships, or in its affirming its being more than its current articulation as a relationship, possibilising new articulations in the future. Either way, the love letter, as an expression of this radical-relational love, has a deterritorializing effect; it disrupts old systems so that new systems might emerge. There is something hopeful in the radicality of an amorous war machine; war, after all, is a process of composition not destruction. Amidst whatever frenzy, embrittled circuits collapse whilst unconcentrated or liberated flows find connection and new potency.

Whilst I must insist upon the almost utopian potential of the love letter, founded in its ability to disrupt relationships through the affirmation of love – my invocation of the war machine comes with a caution. The war machine is made vulnerable to appropriation by repressive/organisational systems instrumentalising deterritorialization as a means of reproducing its anticipatory codes. To say that a war machine has been appropriated by a system of codification, is not (necessarily) to say that it is wielded like a weapon by the operative party, rather that it assumes the logics of codification, and thereby begins to reproduce the regime of structuration itself. What this means, in real terms, is that the love letter can affect the defensive consolidation, or otherwise the coerced subordination of desire; one might find themselves retreating into less contingent but more closed postures, or indeed conforming regardless of one's wishes to the wants of another (from a mechanical perspective, the distinction between these two seems almost to disappear).

Abstract as this surely seems (and unfished as it definitely is) I hope, with fidelity to both the text and sentiment of Arnold's interview, that the following transcript will expand upon these ideas in realer terms still. My thanks again to Arnold for lending his time and his mind for the hours of this discussion; you where, you'll be glad to know, as problematic (read: problematical) as ever.

ARNOLD

What do you think a love letter is?

I should have anticipated this...

It's a huge question, so take it wherever you like. If there's somewhere else you want to start even, which is only adjacent, then go for it...

A love letter is an effort to convey your most heartfelt emotions to someone in a private context, right? Because for me, a love letter shouldn't be something public. It's a very private thing; it gives you the opportunity to be transparent, and to highlight how you really, really feel about something – without any pressure to conform to societal norms. [...] For me, I think love letters are about another person. That's what comes to me first. It just gives you this space to talk candidly in a way that you otherwise might not be able to – even for people who just sit in the same room together and have a very open, honest, and trusting relationship. There's something about writing it down on paper and giving it to them; a new channel opens up, where you can talk about things and say things which would otherwise be too embarrassing. Or difficult to convey – because you might not be able to articulate them well enough. So, I think for me, it's a deeply, deeply personal reflection on your sincerely held emotions.

Do you think that love letters can contain and convey those feelings? Do the words hold those feelings? Or the gesture? Maybe something beyond the letter as such? Is the point of the letter to capture feelings and give them to somebody?

I guess it depends. What we touched on earlier, about the fact that there might be love letters to things which are not people... Maybe just confine the conversation a little, to the traditional love letter... A note, a letter written to someone who you love, whether that'd be a romantic partner – I think usually it would be a romantic partner... I think the limitations of language are very real, and to convey deeply held emotions about someone is always going to be a formidable task. I mean, it's going to be very, very difficult to put into words how you feel about someone. Which is why we have artistic genres like poetry, which are operating with an interesting proximity to the sublime; you're getting at something that isn't even semantically sensical, but which - for some reason - resonates with us... Which is why I think that a lot of love letters are written as poetry; written through the medium of poetry - which is obviously very dangerous. Poetry is very difficult. You're most likely going to write a bad poem, which is maybe worse than writing an actually nice love letter. So I don't know – is it possible to really convey all that? I think no. But there is something in what you said. I think the gesture of giving a love letter, that's very important because it signifies that your trying at least. You're willing to put to paper your most heartfelt emotions, and your deepest feelings about a person. Even if it doesn't convey them, maybe there's just something about the act itself that signifies a person's trying – there's something to be said for that.

Can you distinguish between love letters and poems? Do you think they're discrete, or could you write a love letter in the form of a poem?

Yes, and the poem is just an example – love letters can take on a variety [of forms]. There's so many different varieties and variants. Some people just draw an image of their romantic interest and give it to them – is that a love letter? I mean, in some ways... I think it would fall under the category of a love letter, even if there's very minimal text. You know, if you just draw a nice image of a person, or something they like, and then put your initials under it to indicate you're the one behind it. That could qualify as a love letter. [...] I've heard of, I can't remember who it was... I think it was an American president who used to write love letters, and most of it was empty space, and he would say something along the lines of "the empty space is there in place of those feelings which cannot be put into words". Which I think is kind of funny, and rings true to what I was saying earlier. But it also shows the versatility of the format. I don't think that there's any prescription to write a poem or write prose; you have to write this or that... I think it's very flexible, and that allows you to show how you feel about something or someone in different ways. If you're not great with words, there's other ways of going about it.

In that case, what do you think distinguishes – for example – any drawing you may or may not give to somebody, from a love letter? What distinguishes the love letter from anything else?

Yeah, it's a very... that's a good question [...] It begs another question about the medium or the format, because I have had friends who, for example, buy a gift for someone; a romantic interest, someone they're courting, but with whom there hasn't really been any romance yet. They're trying to initiate something... And they'll buy them a gift as a way of showing their interest [...] something quasi-romantic, like a framed flower. They're trying to suggest something, right? It's the beginning of a courtship process, they're trying to urge someone into a way of thinking; "Hey, maybe you should take an interest in me because I'm buying you these classic gifts". But a gift is obviously very different from a love letter, in abstract terms... But, you know, I'd actually struggle to see the difference between, for example, if I drew a photograph, or if I wrote a very nice poem, or if I drew a very nice picture and gave it to you as a gift, it's kind of also a love letter. So there's some overlap there. It's a type of gift – I think I said that in my initial definition – it's a gift. Although, when you're asking if there's a distinction, I... you know, it's a good question. I think probably, for example, the framed flower would likely fall under the category of a gift; it's not created by the gifter – I think you need to create it yourself. That's definitely an important quality. But if you drew someone's favourite flower and then gave it to them, or a photograph inscribed with a poem that maybe you didn't even write – I'd consider those love letters; even though boundaries are blurring a little. But I also think that the intention is interesting [...] I don't know very much about love letters, but if you think of a stereotypical Shakespearean love letter exchange – like some medieval thing – I'd generally imagine two people who are madly in love with each other, exchanging these letters back and forth. But I also think that you can write a love letter in a timid way. You write them a letter that is – or you give them something that is – just a little comment, or a gift with a note. You might just be hinting at the fact that you're interest in them. It's a different stage of the relationship, it's unclear because you can't show that kind of passion or that enthusiasm at such an early stage. Especially in our modern society – which I have some thoughts on but I don't want to

disrupt...

No, no, no, please – wherever you want to go...

Well, for me, the one thing I was thinking about was just that in today's day and age, there's so much reluctance to show passion or interest – in hobbies or whatever it may be... You know, there's this classic thing that you hear all the time: nobody dances in the club anymore. Because they're afraid of getting filmed. It's a cliché; a bit of a stereotype. But I think there's some truth to it. Everyone's a bit on-edge, a bit nervous about how they're being perceived in a way that's unique to our era; because of social media, because of the technologies at our disposal... And I think that this must have some bearing on something like a love letter. A love letter, to me, in its highest platonic form is an incredibly revealing expression of your deepest emotions – even in a way that's kind of embarrassing. Like, the trope of finding someone's love letters, it's a sort of joke. Is it not kind of funny to see [someone] talk in this way, it's almost out of character; you're behaving in a way that's not true to your person –you're getting out of yourself and writing in a way that's true to you in some ways, but also kind of un-true. You're behaving in a way that's not at all like yourself. If you found your grandparents' love letters, you'd think "That's not the person I knew, these are totally different qualities that they're exhibiting here". I think that's interesting. Maybe historically there's been more opportunity to behave in a way besides-yourself, or to do things that where unusual or bizarre, because... What are the ramifications of acting quirky in a major metropolitan area in the 70s? There's not a town or village to condemn you, go to your parents and say, "Your son was acting like a fool at the bar". There's none of that. And now, today, it's like the entire world has its eyes on you; people are very nervous to behave like that. And I think that that problem bears a little bit on love letters. People aren't accustomed to that sort of thing. You need to be a little accustomed to doing it, maybe, to write a good love letter. You have to feel comfortable with getting out of your comfort zone and putting words on a page that feel – I don't know – that feel revealing. In an almost exhibitionist way.

I'm trying to figure out what the next question is... there's two things I'm finding particularly interesting. One, is this point about visibility, or nakedness, maybe there's even a degree of risk implied by that personal exposure. Second, you made the point that in these sorts of situations, you aren't really yourself, your besides yourself. When you talked about poetry, you said that there's always the problem of a poem's being bad, right? Do you think that that's important in writing a love letter – you must be ready to fail, or to be embarrassed, if you're going to get something true to the spirit of a feeling? You need to risk the consequences of your getting naked?

I mean, obviously poems are not the only thing that can be bad. You could make a bad drawing, a bad letter – in normal prose, a bad prosaic letter. It's not just poems. I think poems present a unique challenge because it's a difficult thing to get right, in a way that writing a normal love letter isn't. Even though it's this deeply personal thing, there are a few cliches you can rely on to write yourself a decent love letter. To write a decent poem on the other hand is very challenging. It's interesting though, what you're talking about – risk. It depends on a lot of things. It depends on the stage of the relationship. The risk is obviously much higher if, for example, the masculine person in the relationship – who is traditionally the pursuer – is at a very early stage, perhaps not even convinced of the other person yet... What if they send this letter and it's a total flop. That's a huge... I mean, that would be something that would concern me if I were to do it. You know, I would never even... I wouldn't consider writing a love letter for that reason [at an early stage]. I just think, if I write this letter and spill my heart out and put everything on the page, and the other person isn't taking [us] that seriously... It could be a very humiliating experience. I would imagine a lot of people feel similarly about that. I think there's no one who... Well, I guess it's just different personalities, because I do know a lot of people who've written love letters at very early stages in their relationships - who're much more comfortable with it going sour.

I also think though, it depends on what your impression of a love letter is, right? For me, [writing a love letter] seems like a very serious thing to do. You'd have to be very sure of yourself, or otherwise a very emotional and very passionate person to be able to write a love letter after seeing someone for only a couple months. I would just be like, "Well, let's be more rational about this; this is too much". But for other people it doesn't seem to be that big of a problem. So I guess it depends on your disposition to some extent, and how comfortable you are with rejection, how susceptible you are to emotional whims – how strongly you feel about things. I'm not someone who's quick to feeling particularly passionate or committed in relationships. It's not something that comes quickly to me. So, it would feel very unusual if I was suddenly, after seeing someone for two months, drafting up this beautiful love letter and putting a lot of effort into it. I'd just say, "I don't know where this is going". It's less for me, at that stage, about risk taking. Although maybe that's just because I'm a risk averse person. I think if I were less risk averse, and if I thought that [writing a love letter] would be something that would impress this person, or that it would push them closer to me... then I might do it.

That's quite instrumental.

I think it's logical. I've been in bad relationships. I've had negative experiences in several relationships. So, I have a sort of "Keep it slow, keep it simple" approach [...] don't lean too hard into it, because you might want to get out. I think I'm just pretty pragmatic about it. I want to be realistic. I want to be sensible about my relationships with other people. And I just think... I just don't know if the love letter is the medium that I would want to express that in. People have different ways of communicating their affection. And for me, a love letter – at an early stage of a relationship – just doesn't feel right. It feels very profound. I think because I would put a lot of effort into it if I were to write someone a love letter... I'm going to sit there and write this for a day or two... If I was writing a speech, if I was the best man at a wedding – you know, this is a pretty serious thing, from a social perspective. So, I'd want to take it seriously. Maybe it's because I would be worried that the language wouldn't come to me right away. I think for some people this kind of romantic language comes to them very easily, and they're able to come up with these metaphors and analogies, stuff they can

relate and tie to other people... I don't think I have that much experience writing love letters; I've written one or two, received some love letters, but generally I didn't think they were very good...

Yours or other peoples?

Other peoples. I'm kind of going beyond the question about risk, but just to wrap it up, I think that – yeah, I think it is a risky thing to do. But often people are kind of infatuated with one another and are willing to overlook shitty poems and stuff like that. Because that's not really the purpose, right? It's not actually about writing an amazing love letter; you're channelling something else by it.

What was it about the one's you received which made them bad love letters?

Well, see... the context, right? The context in which they were written to me wasn't good. I had one relationship, and I'll spare you the excruciating details, but it was... it wasn't a good ending. And there was – you know – a lot of breaking things and yelling, and it was just... very unpleasant. And then, in an effort to try and reconcile our differences, this person was writing me love letters and leaving them in weird places. In my university locker, in a PO box, in the door of my car. I would read them, but it was hard for me to enjoy them because I just thought – well, I had no interest. This person was not [in their right mind]. I [was] unhappy with them, so it wasn't, I couldn't... you know...

Some people do write – I hear – successful love letters that bring someone back into their lives. But that was not my experience. I was upset with this person, and I received these love letters, and I guess... I guess I didn't feel that it was genuine. That's probably important as well – I would read them and think to myself "This is not earnest, this is manipulation"...

It's instrumental.

Yeah.

Do you think that love letters can be sort of abject- Or off-putting, in the same way that you might see somebody naked who you really didn't want to see naked, and that nakedness can become offensive? Is there similarly, potentially, an offensiveness to the love letter?

Oh, yeah...

Yes, obviously, of course. I'm sure this isn't a unique opinion. If you're harassing someone with love letters, I think that can be very uncomfortable. I know many women who have been berated and bombarded with love letters in a way that made them feel uncomfortable. And there's a spectrum within that un-comfortability, from being mildly off put because the love letters were not well written or because it was just a bit weird or a bit early, all the way to the far end which is genuinely frightening. "This person is unstable, and sending me all this material which implies we have some sort of romantic affection for one another, when we really don't". Which goes back to the point about context, the time and place of the letter in the relationship. If it's very early on, if its misplaced, it can capsize the relationship. Or you can get a different perspective – "This person's sending me a love letter; we're not there yet..."

Is there something in particular about a love letter which can make it an especially disquieting thing to receive?

Yeah, I think that it can imply a certain level of shared affection that isn't there.

I want to focus on "shared". My immediate response when you first said it – and perhaps this is indicative of my own neurosis – is that there's an aversion to somebody's intense feelings in and of themselves. But now I'm thinking, stressing shared-ness, that perhaps you're suggesting the love letter can affect an appropriation of feeling; in someone's giving you a love letter, they are depriving you of the opportunity to consent to wanting it. It's presumptive.

That is what I'm suggesting [...] but I think both can be true at once right? I think that both this aversion to their advances and this point about consent and pre-emptive action – they're mutually non-exclusive. They work together. [...] You hear this classic thing that, when you get hit on by someone you don't find attractive, and they do it in a way that's a little unorthodox, a lot of the time the reaction is that its creepy. Whereas if you get hit on by somebody you think is hot, who you really like, it doesn't matter what way they approach you – you're making some kind of visual assessment. I mean, that's usually what it comes down to. Which I think is totally human and natural and is not something to be condemned; that's just the reality of the situation; we're very visual creatures. If someone approaches you and you like the way they look, you're more willing to give them the benefit of the doubt on a lot of things. You're enticed by their presence, "This could lead to something tonight" - or whatever. If it's someone who's not attractive, and they're pestering you, that's just the worst... especially if they have a weird way of going about it. You can easily categorise them as creepy [...] It's basically that they've misread the situation. That's what it comes down to, when you have a negative response to a love letter. They've misread our dynamic. You haven't allowed me to... I didn't consent to this... I didn't give you the space to give this to me, and you did it anyways....

As an aside, before I ask another question, Barthes in 'The Lover's Discourse' says something along the lines of "The only acceptable response to someone's saying, 'I love you' is an immediate, unflinching, almost unthinking 'I love you too'". No other conjugation of those words will suffice, if there's a moment's hesitation the moment's gone. In that sense, the phrase "I love you"- Saying it assumes a certain response – it's not so much a statement of feeling, it's asking another to confirm they feel the same...

It's a huge amount of pressure to conform. If someone says that to you, you have this gut feeling that you have to say it back, or else you'll hurt their feelings. Or, it depends on how emotional you are, what level of compassion and empathy you have; I guess some people don't have that, but that's something I would feel. I've been in situations where someone has told me they love me, and it's in a context that I think is maybe inappropriate or at a time when I was not ready to say it, and I still said it because I felt pressure to do so – because of exactly what you're describing.

It's sort of coercive?

Beyond that, it's less a confirmation, and almost asking for agreement. Because you can ask for confirmation in a way that's less suggestive.

Yes, I think it is. I mean, this is a sort of contested thing in relationships: when do you say, "I love you"? There's a lot of questions about that because I think people are tapped into [the question's] coercive nature. They see, in a roundabout way, that when you say, "I love you", you're putting pressure on someone... to go beyond the confirmation; "We're on the same page, right? We agree?". It's not "What do you think? I feel like this...". I suppose that could fall into the category of confirmation as well, but there's this...

There's an assumption...

Yeah. Growing up my mother would always frame questions in that way, and it just caused all sorts of issues. She would say "Oh, you're not hanging out with those kids tomorrow, right?". That's not even asking for confirmation. It's a suggestion, she's telling me how she feels about the situation. So, now, even though that was my plan, I'm in a position where either I lie or change the plans – and usually what ended up happening was that I'd lie. I

wouldn't suggest doing that with kids because it just causes them to lie – from my experience. And the same goes for "I love you"; you're pushing, you're putting an uncomfortable pressure on them.

So, if "I love you" is a question, it's rhetorical.

Yeah, and I think to continue with this, a love letter gets to that point, right? Which is why it feels so intense, why it feels so important, why people feel so uncomfortable if it's not done in the right way, or if it's delivered too early; if the contents of the letter, what the sender's saying, doesn't match up with the intensity of the relationship... If you're saying very intense things, and you've been dating for a week and a half, the recipient is going to realise there's an asymmetry. The same goes for "I love you" – if you say "I love you" over a weekend... unless you're both a little smitten, it's a bit much. I'd say...

You've talked about love letters carrying these assumptions, you've also talked about dishonesty and they're being instrumentalised... I'm wondering if this discomfort is rooted also in a sense that the other person isn't engaged with reality? There's a failure to recognise you. There's a dissonance. Is it something to do with the sense that, if it really were love, they'd be cognisant of the dynamics which you as a quote-unquote "rational actor"...

Yeah, I mean – I hate to frame myself in that way because I don't think of myself as this cold, calculating person; unable to feel the warmth, the fire, the passion that propel relationships... I really detest the logical endpoint of that kind of [cold, calculated] thinking. I'd like to think I'm more of a soul-based than a mind-based person. That being said... I just feel like it depends on a history; I've had bad relationships where there's been a real divergence in perception. This person saw things one way, I saw them another. And they're radically different [perspectives]; trying to get them on the same page is a nightmare. They were very painful experiences for me. Because of that, in an inverted way, I almost feel like love letters – which are usually associated with passion – ought to be treated rationally too. There is a kind of inversion there, because it can be so painful. But I suppose that's true for anything else – there's always two sides.

As for your question regarding asymmetry, I think it is a part of it. Which starts me thinking... I would be curious to know – and this is a very rationalist way of thinking – I'd be curious to know how many love letters actually get somebody to change [their mind]? How often is it that there's a broken relationship and the guy sends the girl a love letter, and she just thinks to herself "Oh my God, I've made a huge mistake, I have to go back..." – and then they go on to have a happy relationship? I'd imagine that's a very seldom thing. I'd imagine, more often – at least historically – there were men pursuing women who'd overload them with love letters, and over the course of time, instead of taking those love letters as a nuisance, she'd begin reading them and think "Oh god, this is a great guy".

He'd wear her down...

That actually did happen, but I think our culture has changed dramatically since then; courtly love has gone. Men are not expected to pursue women in the same way, even though I think there's a residue, or there's artefacts of that culture which remain. And I earnestly believe that that's the natural state of thing. I think men are pursuing, women are evading, and men are left chasing... This is a very Daoist kind of thing. I think there's something fundamental about that condition; the human condition is not cultural, it's pre-cultural. That being said, we live in a society now that frowns on those antiquated ways of going about romance. Now men aren't expected to pay for dates, men aren't expected to pursue women; there's all these apps designed so that women text first – all this stuff. They're trying to invert it. I'd imagine it's not going to work, it's contrary to our human nature. But that's the zeitgeist [...]

I'm getting to this very slowly, but it seems to me that the love letter, oftentimes, isn't especially potent. It's not actually alerting the trajectory of the relationship. Rather, it's a way for two people to indicate things to one another without any external pressure; there's no oversight. And you don't need to do it in person. It's like how people prefer to break up over text, even if you should call her or go see her in person. There's something nice about communicating something difficult over text, or in a written letter; you can express yourself more clearly, and you don't have to confront the person face to face. I think that goes for both negative and positive things; the negative being of course, breaking up, but the positive thing would be trying to confess your sincere feelings for them. Both of these are difficult, and you want to be able to do them in the right way – if you say something wrong or weird, it might be misinterpreted; it can go south. There's something nice about holding that space. But I don't know if the love letter is changing that many relationships. My intuition is that people aren't thinking, "Oh my God, this guy was treating me like shit, but he wrote me the most beautiful love letter, I think we should go out again", right? I don't get the sense that they carry that much weight...

Maybe it's about taking the relationship up; we're talking about symmetry, there's rungs to relationships, and [the love letter's] trying to elevate it to the next level. This is why you can write a love letter that isn't an expression of capital L love. You could write someone a letter at a very early stage in the relationship and express some genuinely beautiful, romantic sentiments that show you're really paying attention, and that you do know about the person; that you like these various aspects [of them]. "Remember when we did this? I've attached a photo from when we went to the beach"... You don't have to say that you love them, but it kind of elevates the relationship. You say, "Oh, wow, you know, we're going up a notch", but it's balanced, right? In that first letter, you don't want to say, "I love you and I want you to have my kids". I think for most people that would be too much. You don't want to hear that, even if you kind of fantasise about it... I think people tend to have these kinds of fantasies – they're impulsively drawn to romantic ideas when they get into a relationship; "What if we get married"... even at the early stages. But if someone said that to you, it would be way too much. So, for me, [the love letter] might be a way of elevating the relationship, acknowledging the level that you're both at; it's a shared thing.

Let me try and reformulate what you've said, and you

No I understand exactly what you're saying, I think you're doing a good job of

can tell me if you think I've got it or not... It sounds like you're saying the love letter shouldn't be an intervention. It creates an opportunity, it opens a possibility, but only through the affirmation of what already is? It's a little confused, but...

summarising. It is an affirmation of what exists. Maybe this is a boring word, and I'd prefer something else, but it's a summary of where you're at. A summary of the relationship. I want to use a word which's a bit more heartfelt, right? "Summary" feels very technical. But it's to show you're paying attention, showing you're on the same page, that you acknowledge them, their traits, their character; it shows you see these positive aspects of them. And then, maybe, hints at some future possibility, it's growing into something more intense... There's always space to make the relationship more intense. But I guess it's about finding where that other person is at?

Changing tact slightly... With all this in mind – in your mind – when do you think you'd write a love letter?

Having this whole conversation has made me realise a lot of what I've said – it's really my love letter. It's not what I think the perfect love letter would be, or what is, per-say, the quintessential qualities of a love letter. I have certain predilections which influence the whole thing. So, when would I write a love letter?

Would you?

Yeah, I would write a love letter. You know, you have to feel it out, right? You have to feel it out. I couldn't want to put it on a timeline, where at X point I'm going to write a love letter. But there are some typical times – someone's birthday, an anniversary... But I'm a big believer in spontaneity. I don't really believe in giving people birthday presents... I try to give people presents as I find them in my day-to-day life. I see things, and think "Oh man, that would be great for so-and-so". And then I just buy it and give it to them. Then their birthday comes and I don't give them anything, because I don't want to be forced to write a love letter out of time; when it's not right. So this element of randomness, spontaneity is important. I also think for a romantic relationship, that's better, right? You don't want your relationship to become – despite what I've said – too mechanical, or logical.

It's interesting that you're invoking spontaneity, because spontaneity implies relationality, which in turn feeds back into what you've been saying about a consciousness of the actualities of the relationship itself. But equally, this spontaneous sense that you may want to write them a letter – that's kind of out of your control...

You don't have control over that. You can kind of control someone's birthday – I mean, it is controlled; you can't control it but it's a controlled factor. Whereas the feeling, the spontaneous sense, you can't control that. And I feel like you should harness that energy to write the love letter. That's how I think it would... that makes sense to me. In the same way, if you see a gift which is appropriate for someone, you know they're going to love it, then you should capitalise on that moment and buy them the fucking gift. Don't force yourself to buy somebody a gift a week before their birthday and think, "What are they going to want? I don't know... What am I going to write in this love letter? A week before our anniversary, I don't know what I'm going to say". That's no good, you're forcing it. It must be organic.

So, that implies certain things about how you'd write a love letter... Originally, I was going to ask you what you'd do if you were to write one – but now that doesn't feel like an appropriate question. You've emphasised it's being so deeply contextual, in one instance it might be appropriate to paste a passage from a book onto a photo, in another you'd be compelled to pour your heart out. Is that total relativity a more or less accurate assessment of your position, or is there something that you feel is necessary?

When I've been with people previously, I've taken notes about things they like. If they say something, if they mention something they like, if they do something that I like, or that I think is attractive, or if I observe something that's characteristically them, or which just causes a rise in me... sometimes I'll write it down and I can use that. I mean, it's a very boring way about it, but it's a good way of giving people gifts. If you see something you think someone will like, just write it down. In the same way for love letters, I write them with this accumulation; when I feel like it's a good time I'll refer to that. But, like you said, it's not something you [prescribe]. It's not like writing an essay. There shouldn't be a format... I think... I think they should be short.

Why?

Well, it's harder to write a short thing than it is to write a long thing.

For some of us, yes...

I think, yeah – it just turns into ramble. I think you should cry. I think it should be short... I was going to ask you, does anyone talk about the physical qualities?

Yes.

This kind of wraps back around to its being contextual. If you were going to give someone a love letter... If you'd has the most fantastic time with them, and you're at a restaurant, and you took one of the napkins and you wrote a love letter on it... that would be a great love letter. That would far exceed any really nice cotton paper, written with a fountain pen... The form is variable; it should be whatever's right for the time, at the time.

Finally, we've talked about the reader needing to be ready to receive the letter, or perhaps a shared readiness for whatever's affirmed by the letter – which, to me, sounds as though you'd need to write the letter in anticipation of the other. Which begs the question – who is the love letter for? Is it for them? Are you writing it, in a way, for yourself? Is there a strict distinction - is a distinction necessary?

I think it should be for them, right? That's the goal, at least for me; I wouldn't put so much time and effort into something solely for my own aggrandisement. You want them to enjoy it, which is why – even though I don't think it has a particular impact on someone's decision making – you still want the quality of the writing to be good. You're writing it for them; you want to mention things which aren't generic, it needs to be a special thing. So, I think the love letter is for them [the recipient]. But it's also a means for the disclosure of your own feelings, which is a gift – I think that's something that's being given.

Is there anything else that you'd like to say, anything else which has risen up – related or not?

No.