

Magazine Issue No.10

# I love you

my printed blog

The Crisis Issue

EU €9



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SELF PORTRAIT OF ME NOW IN MASK  
2011

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# JOACHIM BESSING

"A crisis in love is good because it brings ostensible damage to our ideals. At the same time there are so many people who make it through their lives without significant damage, because their whole life is damaged."

INTERVIEW MIRNA FUNK  
PHOTOGRAPHY MARCUS GAAB

The first time I read Joachim Bessings' novel *Untitled* (2013) I was lying on the beach in Tel Aviv. I had lain there hundreds of times over the course of 23 years: I had gotten sunburns or sometimes even turned a healthy bronze. I'd plunged into the water or stood under one of the countless showers to experience a moment of refreshment. I had conversations or just passed the hours in silence. For 23 years. And while this beach, like so much in life, assumed this repetitive structure, unexpected moments that could stretch on for months created something which could commonly be referred to as a crisis.

Only a few months after my stay in Tel Aviv, I met Joachim to talk to him about those moments that shake the structure of the everyday and are as necessary for life as inhaling or exhaling.

**In your book *Untitled* you describe a love that is not very straightforward and perhaps also not insanely happy. Would it be possible to call the love described in the book a love crisis?**

I would rather say that the moment of falling in love automatically constitutes a crisis. A crisis is a point of concentration in need of a solution, because this kind of constant concentration isn't possible. What you probably mean by not straightforward is the long lingering feelings concentrated at their highest point, the want and the unredeemed desire. However, what I would like to ask is: what do you think is not straightforward or doesn't create happiness, because I think what I wrote there is extremely cheering.

**In my opinion the protagonist doesn't appear to be insanely happy. Of course, I could imagine that getting through the crisis leads to a state of greater satisfaction.**

You mean because he cries so much and has desire, that he's not happy?

**I wouldn't say that someone who cries can't be happy, but I don't think he's happy, because there's something totally unfulfilled there.**

What is unfulfilled? I'll name the coordinates of fulfillment for you: He encounters a woman who triggers something in him that he never experienced before. He can meet with her, they can talk to each other, they kiss, go for walks, write each other letters. Now, what is missing?

**He is missing a true closeness to her.**

You could say that she brings him a different kind of closeness, which is also much better for him.

**She keeps him at a distance. Maybe so he doesn't enter into a kind of symbiotic closeness with her, but it happens anyway. It's about possession, then something happens with him that is completely obsessive. It's not a case of distance bringing her to a healthy closeness. At times when they don't see each other, she's still continuously there.**

There is this one moment where from his sickbed he asks her how often they've actually seen each other in the last few months, and she says that they were together the whole time, because he was always present in her consciousness. This is the best one could achieve. The conventional closeness that you claim for him, she already has with her husband. She is, after all, still married, and she knows what she has there. She can't have this with the protagonist, because she absolutely wants to remain married to this man.

**She has a very conventional relationship, thus preventing a normal relationship with the protagonist. Honestly, there's something sadistic about this, because she tries to secure another kind of closeness, but she keeps this closeness from him, she experiences it with someone else.**

It is simply a self-confident woman that brings out the best for herself. It could be all the

same to her what becomes of the others. It could also be all the same to her what becomes of her husband. But she knows exactly what she wants from both. In this sense she's a step further than Madame Bovary. With her it's mostly reversed, since the men have always said what they want from her.

**Do you think love makes one unhappy?**

I thought about that for almost a year. I also went to Africa to be alone and think about it. I also thought about what misfortune could mean, like pain, restlessness, or longing. But for me there is a pleasant component to longing. I find it good to be able to feel something. I believe that it's almost the only thing that makes being human really interesting. In addition to death there is love. If you fall in love, someone comes into your life that can that can fundamentally change everything in ten seconds. This is sublime and it's worth it, no matter how much it hurts later.

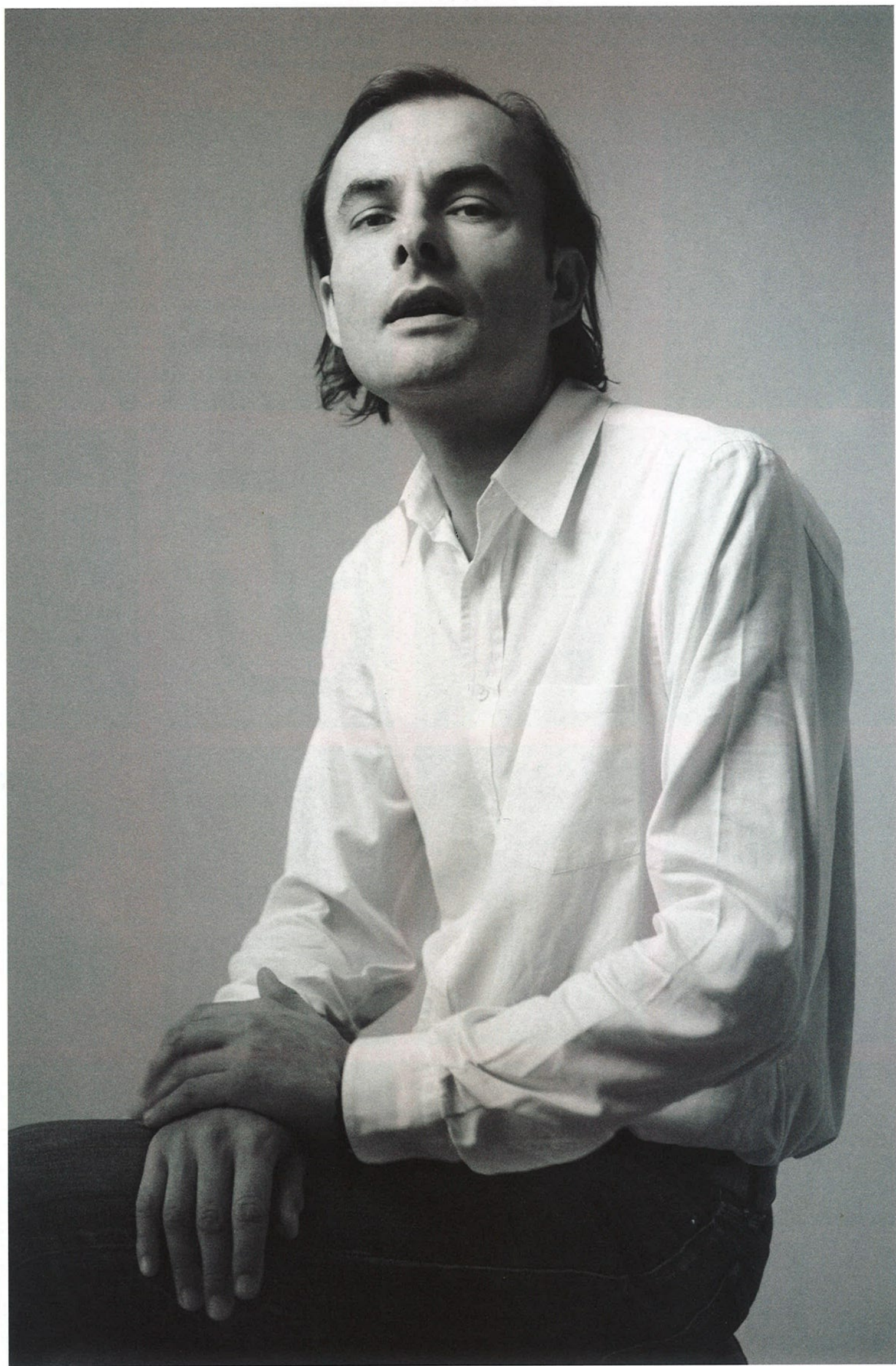
**I have an extremely lovesick friend and ...**

What is lovesick?

**Lovesick is when the person you supposedly love disappears behind your own feelings and everything that you project onto this person has more to do with yourself than the other person.**

But it's always that way. With most psychological problems and their analysis or therapeutic approach, you always find out more about yourself, and most therapies work with you learning to formulate an approach. This process explains so much. In the book it's like this too, when he needs this closeness and absolutely has to know what she's doing, it's also because he doesn't value himself enough. With her, it seems that her husband, Frederick, is indeed very reliable and doesn't find anything too bad, looking at it from the other side, on another frequency just a bit too little is communicated, and she gets that from the protagonist.





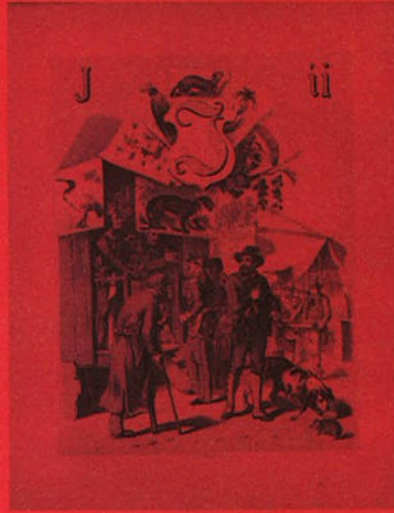


I explain to her that since I've been photographing the letter J, that I've stored hundreds and hundreds of these photos on my hard drive; that I look at these files over and over again and that they give me peace, certainty – I start to cry. I say: Ms. Achermann, I'm very sick. I suffer from love for Julia, she suffocates me, she takes everything from me. I'm like this person in the film from Baz Luhrmann who

draws a black pistol from her purse and presses it against her head: I yearn for death! The therapist stopped her doodling, looks at me, and says: Next Monday at eight thirty? I nod and put on my coat. What, if not this?

– excerpt from "Untitled" (Kiepenheuer & Witsch, page 117)

Translated by Alicia Reuter





### **Why do we actually call this love?**

Love is one of those difficult to define terms because because we consolidate a number of different symptoms under love. What is fascinating about life, like art, is that a whole series of phenomena belong to it and it's incredibly hard to say when it is or even no longer is. You can't exactly say, this is design and not art, or this is just scribbling. It's the same with love. There are obsessions. There are moments of brilliance. Things are quickly muddled together like love, relationship, partnership, and marriage. Where are the boundaries of friendship? I'm fascinated by the topic of friendship – normally you don't have sex with friends – it seems as though it's indestructible and will last forever. Thus, it represents exactly what one wants for love.

### **Is there always someone in the relationship who loves more?**

Yes, I think so. At one point he quotes Baudelaire and it's quite beautifully and poetically written, for in a relationship, one is always the surgeon and the other is the patient. I wouldn't quantify it exactly like this, that one loves more or less, but you always play a different roll. One keeps a cool head, so to speak, and it is, of course, usually the woman. It's conditioned through evolution; women have to be more promiscuous than men, because there are only a few eggs and a crazy amount of sperm.

### **In your book the protagonists communicate a lot over the iPhone, sending images and songs back and forth. Here, they experience digitalization as a blessing. At what point is digitalization a curse?**

At none at all. I no longer see a separation between the equipment and myself. This is like a dualism between the body and soul, and for me it's all one. I find the body to be very annoying sometimes and digitalization allows for the abandonment of the body, so to speak. I believe the difference between friendship and partnership is another way of being related to the self. I believe that in a friendship one is much more oriented towards oneself and to the other, just as love actually pretends to be. Rather, love means that as a pair you're oriented on a third thing, meaning a child or for some it could be an animal.

### **As you said at the beginning, falling in love is a kind of crisis, because it's concentrated a bit. Do you think that the intensity of this love crisis says something about the truthfulness of feeling?**

It's hard to say. To measure the quality of the crisis behooves only those who are stuck in the crisis. In the book it is so that you could meet someone, who actually leads a super life...

### **Oh? I wouldn't say that.**

Okay, most people would like to fly quite a lot, to have an interesting dinner every evening, to stay in wonderful hotels, without knowing that it is also quite stressful, but ...

### **You can feel this right from the beginning, that it's all really exhausting.**

Exactly. Therefore, he was so caught in the crisis that if you reflect on it therapeutically, you realize that he wants out of it before he meets Julia Speer. Consequently, he uses getting to know Julia Speer for the purpose of expediting this kind of self-sabotaging crisis, so that he really loses almost everything he has.

### **In your novel the crisis is mainly triggered by the protagonist and not by Julia. What happens when the crisis only happens to one, and not both?**

It's also harrowing for Julia. The point where she lives in Australia and is using the phone sitting on the floor is clearly described. It's also interesting that her husband never thought of asking what is going on with her. Suffering taking place on both sides is mutually reinforced.

### **Why is a love crisis good?**

A crisis in love is good because it brings ostensible damage to our ideals. At the same time there are so many people who make it through their lives without significant damage, because their whole life is damaged. What I want to say is that monotony in everyday life determines the lives of the majority. After working at the supermarket checkout, you go home and turn up a serving of a TV program. You want a bigger television and to go on vacation twice a year. Maybe you're sick at some point, and this goes on until you die. So a crisis rips everything apart and maybe

you lose everything. Maybe you're completely broke or everyone thinks you're crazy, but it's great because at least it's something a bit different. At least you've experienced something and then naturally you live to tell about it. If you don't do that, that's a shame.

### **A love crisis is so incredibly liberating. As I experienced mine in 2009, I thought I wouldn't survive. Now I think that it's the best thing that could have happened at the time.**

Yes, but if you're in it, then it sucks. There is this story of the frog that fell into a glass of milk and was trapped there. Then he kicks for so long that the milk becomes butter and he can escape again.

### **That's a very nice image of crisis. People should have more crises.**