Love is not a subject

Ton Haarmans · Wide Open Windows



For years my work has revolved around one question: how experience takes form.

How worlds appear. How certainty stabilizes perception. How identities arise, dissolve, reorganize. Curiosity was the motor. There was always something to look at, something to pull apart, something to place at a distance. Lately that distance seems gone.

When the topics stop opening

I notice it in a simple way: the subjects that used to draw me no longer pull. Not because they are solved, but because they no longer open.

What remains looks almost embarrassing to write down: breathing, sleeping, dishes, going to the bathroom. My partner is here. The dogs are here.

That is the day.

Love as a given

When I try to approach love with the same curiosity that carried all my other work, nothing happens. There is no angle. No question. No object.

Love is not something I am curious about. It is simply there. A given. A condition.

And conditions cannot be studied from the inside.

Me: I do not even know if I find this interesting. It feels too close.

ChatGPT: If there is no distance, curiosity has nowhere to stand. You are not observing. You are part of the situation.

The answer was reasonable. Maybe even accurate. And yet the core of it is simpler.

There is nothing to look at here.

Proximity

Love does not present itself as a topic. It does not stand in front of me. It does not open a field.

It is more like gravity than like a landscape. You do not walk through it. You fall in it. And from within falling, there is no “about”.

What there is instead is proximity.

Not romantic intensity. Not drama. Not metaphysics.

Proximity: someone in the kitchen. Dogs breathing in sleep. A shared rhythm of days. Irritations, habits, warmth, dependency. The quiet fact that life is not being lived alone.

None of this invites investigation. It resists it.

Curiosity needs a gap. Love closes it.

The image of a life that needs no explanation

At some point I wondered out loud what life might look like for someone who seems to coincide with her life. As if living were enough. As if no remainder demanded explanation.

It is easy to project. We never see a life, only its expression. But the projection reveals something: the desire for a life that does not need to be turned into a question.

That image struck something sore.

What remains

If love were a subject, I could work with it. I could refine it, place it, connect it, weave it into the architecture of my thinking.

But love does not become a subject. It dissolves the position from which subjects appear.

It does not answer questions. It interrupts the need for them. Not in a mystical way. In a practical one.

Someone has to be walked. Something has to be cooked. A body gets tired. A hand touches another hand. A day passes without asking permission.

When I stay close to that, nothing forms into an essay.

And that may be exactly the point.

Maybe this text is not about love. Maybe it is a record of the failure of my usual way of making sense.

For a long time, curiosity carried my life. Now life seems to be carrying itself. Not as fulfillment. Not as insight. As fact.

Love is not a subject. It is what remains when there is no longer a place to stand from which to make one.

One of the dogs has been biting in a wall of our house. I need to fix it.