

# WITH LOVE Place Begins

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“The real measure of the qualities of a city is  
whether one can imagine falling in love in it.”

(Palasmaa, 1996)



# INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Although it has never been completely neglected, the notion of love has often been discredited or rejected within academic circles<sup>(Weis, 2006)</sup>. Judged “too elusive”<sup>(Weis, 2006)</sup>, or “[...] too emotional for social scientists to take seriously”<sup>(Ackerman, 1995)</sup>, the assumptions that the emotion was too subjective or too convoluted to be studied have pervaded social sciences and have historically contributed to its invalidation.<sup>(Jónasdóttir, 2015)</sup> Following the academic tendency to favour negative emotions such as fear, anger, depression or hate<sup>(Lindholm, 2006)(Hayes, 2017)</sup>, most researches done on the subject have preferred to focus on “[...] what happens when love is deficient, thwarted, warped, or absent rather than love per se [...]”.<sup>(Ackerman, 1995)</sup> While these approaches have been necessary to the valuable recognition of the pluralities of gender, romantic and sexual diversities, and have provided essential insights on the patriarchal, heteronormative and consumerist masks<sup>(Kipnis, 2009)</sup> that love has been taking, the consideration of the overarching notion of love has been a topic routinely averted by academic inquiry.<sup>(Jónasdóttir, 2015)</sup> Considered either as untouchable (as if studying it would annihilate its magic)<sup>(May, 2019)</sup>, or too polysemantic (meaning too many things to too many people)<sup>(Hamilton, 2006)</sup>, love has acquired a quasi-sacrosanct character which led it to be often considered as a form of myth for the modern world.<sup>(Lewis, 2013[1936])(Solomon, 1983)(Weber, 1946)(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1990)(Illouz, 1997)(Lindholm, 2006)(May, 2011)(Seebach, 2017)(May, 2019)</sup> Considering that virtually no other concepts are still under such taboo — like suicide or religion might have once been — love appears to be re-surfacing in academia in line with what Foucault described as the *insurrection of subjugated knowledges*: when seemingly fluffy, obvious or banal notions burst in disclosure to reveal deeper social tensions and more complex realities.<sup>(Foucault, 1980)</sup>

Even if reluctances are still present, an array of contemporaries, from all social sciences, have now started to pay closer attention to love by progressively identifying its centrality in a series of social phenomena. Building on the shoulders of giants such as Marx, Hegel, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel or Benjamin — who have all considered the notion in their work<sup>(Illouz, 2020)</sup> — the field of “love studies”,<sup>(Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2015)</sup> that surfaced through the affective turn of the 90s,<sup>(Clough, 2007)</sup> has been attempting to create bridges between the individual experience of love and its origin, meaning and capacities at the societal level. We now recognise that the historical bypass of love within social and natural sciences was probably just one more mark of its critical role and potential.<sup>(May, 2019)</sup> Often compared to the taboo previously associated to sexuality,<sup>(Blum, 2005)</sup> we now allow ourselves to overcome that academic timidity typically connected to love and welcome it as valid study matter. We accept that if the understanding of social, political, religious and economic structures is crucial for an awareness of how the world operates — and how it *could* be — we should not be leaving aside the consideration of our emotions, especially one that occupies such a central role in our lives.<sup>(Paz, 1993)</sup> We accept that we should not overlook a tension that has been saturating all forms of art, that reflects our resisting nature in the face of oppressive forces<sup>(Alberoni, 1979)(Illouz, 1997)(hooks, 2000)(Vaneigem, 2010)(Hardt & Negri, 2011)(Badiou, 2013)(Horvat, 2016)(Han, 2017)(Grossi and West, 2018)</sup>, that has been sustaining one of the most fertile nests of our imagination,<sup>(Chessick, 1992, 2005)(Liberman, 2009)(Förster, Epstude and Özelsel, 2009)</sup> and, some have suggested, that sits at the cornerstone of the “discovery” of the modern individual.<sup>(Morris, 1972)</sup> Finally, we understand that the history of love — in this eclectic assemblage of cultures that we call Western — has been running in parallel and has been occupying an elemental role in the history of modernity<sup>(Illouz, 2013)(May, 2019)(Giddens, 1993)</sup>, the history of fiction<sup>(Ashe, 2018)(Girard, 2013)</sup>, the history of women’s emancipation<sup>(Paz, 1993)(Solomon, 1983)(Ackerman, 1995)(Nehring, 2009)(Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2015)(Cannone, 2020)</sup>, and the history of resistance itself.<sup>(Hardt, 2011)(Nussbaum, 2015)(Horvat, 2016)(York, 2018)</sup>

While still forming, this understanding has now virtually penetrated all fields of studies, changed practices and generated new sensibilities in research methods and outcomes.<sup>(Jónasdóttir, 2015)</sup> A shift that has affected all areas of research with the blatant omission of spatial practices. In a field (1) at the intersection of poetics and ethics<sup>(Pérez Gómez, 2008)</sup>, a hotbed of emotional implications (2) where considerations on intimacy, privateness and publicness are commonplace, if not fundamental (3) where the use of creativity is enmeshed in its most relational and emotional dimension, (4) where the correlation between its practice and the advent of modernity is, in the West, dialectically defined<sup>(Heynen, 2000)</sup>,

(5) where fictional narratives are interlaced with human activity, engaged at many levels, from research to programme to design, and (6) where we have been trying to draw paths for decades, if not centuries, to imagine ways to resist oppressive structures such as market imperatives or patriarchy, it is preposterous that we can literally count on one hand the few who have ventured in trying to build bridges between an emotional intention at the centre of life and the field responsible for understanding and materialising the setting in which we want this life to exist and develop. It is this glaring indifference towards love, a notion with conspicuous relevance for a field concerned with the emotional relationship of humans with their environment, that has generated and fuelled the interest into this research. Only by examining the spatial dimension of love — how it came to be and how it is — will we be able to understand the possible links and implications of the notion for spatial practices.

By focusing on its urban dimension and Western form, we will firstly be describing how an emotion, such as love, can be represented in space by presenting another emerging concept: the one of atmospheres. Secondly, we will be trying to untangle what we might be talking about when we talk about love by highlighting in literature two aspects of its nature with particular relevance for architecture and urban design. Thirdly, we will trace a history of how the modern expression of the urban atmosphere of love has come into being by looking at its roots in three social transformations of the past centuries. Finally, we will attempt to outline the recurring motifs of a contemporary urban atmosphere of love from twenty different interview participants of differing backgrounds, which thereafter will be visualised in the analysis of two case study streets.

While other cities could have been selected, other places that are also emblematic imaginaries of love and beacons of possibilities (like New York City or present-day Mumbai for example<sup>(Abbott and Jermyn, 2008)</sup>), the whole study will be taking Paris as a background. Its reputation, crystallised as the City of Love in the contemporary Western imaginary, but also as the Capital of Modernity<sup>(Harvey, 2006)</sup> and the site of major social upheavals of occidental history has propelled its relevance as a contextual location. Additionally, this text is also linked with a design project that aims to make use of the findings and to visualise an alternative spatial future for a suburban area of the French Capital. We will see that by embodying the concepts of possibility, difference and delight, the notion of love and its spatiality has proved itself to be potent, not only to reveal the deficiencies of reality, but also to gracefully assemble the paths and clues to give us a chance to inhabit it fully.<sup>(Chollet, 2004)</sup>

# I CAN FEEL IT IN THE AIR TONIGHT

The first question to address to understand how love can relate to spatial practices is to ask: *What are emotions like in space? How do we feel, produce and project emotional experiences (like love) spatially?* Out of words like cosy, eerie or bleak, we can simulate, in our minds, detailed affective worlds that we can experience in their full sensuality — *think of the last great novel you have read and feel again that universe you have created out of words on a page.* We can also use the same type of terms to describe the sensations that we feel in certain spaces — *remember the most gloomy street you ever been in.* And finally, we can use those same concepts to physically generate worlds that carry the emotions that are contained in them — *put yourself in the shoes of a set designer that needs to construct a spooky decor.*

Entering social sciences in the 1990s, the notion of *atmospheres* emerged to put a name on these phenomena. While the word has been used meteorologically from the 17th century onwards, and culturally since the 19th to designate the tone or ambience of a space or of a piece of art, its significance has broadened in the past decades and infiltrated all social sciences with a notable presence in the fields of geography, anthropology and architectural theory. (Gandy, 2016) Occurring concurrently as the *spatial turn* and the *affective turn*, which described the growing propensity of social sciences to pay attention to spatial and emotional dimensions from the 90s onwards, what has been called the *atmospheric turn* (Sobecka, 2018) can be considered the product of the intersection of both of these new considerations. Evocative of other terms like the German *stimmung* or Walter Benjamin's *aura*, atmospheres appeared to discuss those “quasi-objective” realities (Böhme, 2017) that exist *in between* space and emotions.

Those “spatialised feelings” (Griffero, 2010) or “spatial carrier of moods” (Böhme, 2017) that can be perceived, produced or simulated and to which we may refer to in common language with terms such as ‘vibe’ or ‘energy’. In the words of the philosopher Gernot Böhme, one of the most vocal thinkers on the notion:

“[...] to talk about atmospheres, you must characterise them by the way they affect you. They tend to bring you into a certain mood, and the way you name them is by the character of that mood. The atmosphere of a room may be oppressive, the atmosphere of a valley may be joyful. But on the other side, you can argue about atmospheres and you even can agree with others about what sort of atmosphere is present in a certain room or landscape. Thus atmospheres are quasi-objective or something existent intersubjectively.” (Böhme, 2017)

Since they exist socially, Böhme advances, atmospheres can not only be felt or discussed but can also be produced. (Böhme, 2006) By playing with variables such as language, geometry, materiality, sounds, smells or light, atmospheres can be “enhanced, transformed, intensified or shaped”. (Cited in Anderson, 2009) Indeed, he sustains, the fact that they can be constructed, giving as example professions like interior or stage design, is the proof of their quasi-objectivity — the opposite case would render these jobs non-existent. (Böhme, 2013) This productive capacity of atmospheres has understandably attracted much attention from architects and urban designers. (Borch, Böhme, Eliasson and Pallasmaa, 2014) (Gandy, 2016) (Böhme and Thibaud, 2017) Pallasmaa describes it as our sixth sense and advances that the work of architects has always been and should continue to be the articulation of atmospheres. (Pallasmaa, 2016) Zumthor comes to similar conclusions while he equates architectural quality to the level at which the atmosphere of a space moves its perceivers. (Zumthor, 2006) Regardless of our appreciation of their practice or theories, it is hard to deny the implications of atmospheres for spatial design. As the philosopher Micheal Hauskeller reminds us: whether we want it or not, to design spaces for people is to design atmospheres since, “[they] are, after all, everywhere that people are.” (Hauskeller, 2019) And what can be perceived and produced can also be imagined.

It is this ability to introspectively construct atmospheres that interest us in the current text: this capacity at the individual and cultural level to *simulate spatialised emotions*. While you might be able to imagine yourself falling in love in any space, not any space comes to mind when you imagine a place where you

can fall in love. And as anyone could admit, almost anywhere can evoke love forasmuch as you are with the right person and in the right mood, and anywhere can turn out to represent anything but love when you are with the wrong person or in the wrong mood, but love itself cannot evoke anywhere or any place. A specific imagery, influenced by a mix of personal experiences and cultural exposure, generates the image that prompts in your individual mind when imagining a space of love. It is this *quasi-objective* human capacity that designers — and even zookeepers (Hauskeller, 2019) — use to simulate emotions in space: to imagine atmospheres that carry a distinct emotional content.

Since, as individuals, we also exist culturally, we make sense of the plurality of sensory input that is presented to us according to specific cultural patterns. (Classen, 1993)(Howes, 1991; 2004)(Lennon, 2017) Consequently, within different cultures, recurring motifs emerge for certain atmospheres which serve to inform designers as to how to alter space to suggest different emotional experiences. (Böhme, 2014) Not static in time or space, these patterns are in constant mutation. Like languages, they reflect the cultural threads and realities of the cultures they belong to and are in constant tension between the normative and nonnormative forces of societies. These motifs assemble and form evolving culturally specific sets, *image-ries*, that *solidifies what is air* (Engels and Marx, 1848)(Berman, 1982) and allow the production of atmospheres. The social anthropologist Mikkil Bille highlights this relationship between the Danish atmosphere of *Hygge*, its *hyggeligt* imagery associated to motifs related to warmth and comfort translated in elements such as blankets, fire, hot drinks and warm lights (*hyggelys*), and its role at the societal level to bond communities, families, friends and lovers together. (Bille, 2019) Similarly, the Japanese concept of *Wabi-Sabi* could be used to demonstrate an analogous relationship between an emotional experience of the world, the aesthetics of its atmosphere and its cultural significance. In this sense, atmospheres can be considered, like myths, as *cultural tools*. By containing their own rituals and imagery, *they tell us stories that contain clues as to how to imagine and project “a way to live in the world that we construct for ourselves”* (Solomon, 1983): vehicles that societies and individuals generate to navigate and construct their way through the social sphere. Like language, they exist as social realities (Searle, 1995), or as Boris Vian would claim it, they are “entirely true stories since they are imaginary from one end to the other”. (Vian, 1947)

The simulation of atmospheres can therefore be seen as a way to adapt cognitively our experience of reality in order to reframe our engagement with it.

By imagining different atmospheres, related to different emotional experiences, we can mentally build worlds — new futures — that carry the meaning and purpose of the emotions associated with them. Similar to Edward Said’s concept of *imaginative geographies* (Said, 1979), they are spatial metaphors, representations of spaces that translate the emotionality of their creators by projecting it spatially. Shaped by our personal experiences, they evolve in accordance or in defiance of the social environments (our cultures) we have been in contact with. What is being proposed here is that the contemporary simulated urban atmosphere related to the emotion of love carries, in the West, a distinct and evolving cultural significance, one that could serve as a direction for architects and urban designers to construct better urban spaces. The reason for this, we argue, comes from the very nature of love, why it exists and what does it seek.

# WHAT WE MIGHT BE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE

Throughout Western history, poets, philosophers, theologians and others have tried, time and again, to bridge the gap between the humane experience of love and its meaning. Through its association with important movements, ideologies and world views, love has been at times elevated to ethical levels while also being connected now and then to other convoluted notions such as beauty, truth or holiness. The obvious examples would include the efforts of Plato, Christians, Humanists, Romantics, Surrealists, Situationists and Marxists who have all engaged in one way or another with the emotion and have left the notion in a tangled ideological mess. In the past decades, however, historical, sociological and philosophical <sup>(Lewis,1936)(De Rougemont,1939)(Solomon,1983)(Singer,1984;1987)(Beck,1990)(Paz,1993)(Ackerman,1995)(Kern,1994)(May,2011)(May,2019)</sup> investigations have been taking a step back to unravel the charged nature of the notion. By tracing the roles, forms and purposes it has been taking over time, we are now able to get a glimpse at its significance at the cultural level.

Although the manifestations of love have been changing through history and contexts, what the emotion yearns for, some have suggested <sup>(Luhmann,1987)(Ackerman,1995)(Lindholm,2006)(Yalom,2012)(May,2019)</sup>, has been constant. In her history of love <sup>(Ackerman,1995)</sup>, Diane Ackerman uses the telling metaphor of a prism to illustrate the semantic and conceptual complexity of the emotion. On one side, the colourful spectrum representing all the types, experiences and variations of love — such as romantic love — and on the other, the white light, symbolising the drive generating them. It is this complex yearning which we will attempt to outline and that, we will argue, furnishes the urban atmosphere of love and the diversity of its manifestations.

As philosopher Simon May notes, since the emotion can be directed at a wide range of objects, such as gods, children, animals, parents, romantic partners, art, countries, political ideals, friends or landscapes and since we make use of the verb ‘to love’ to describe concepts as different to each other as sexual desire, faith or altruism, it is only with a comprehensive understanding of what he calls the *ground* of love (what it seeks) that we can make sense of it. <sup>(May,2019)</sup> In other words, it is only by understanding what motivates love that we will be able to picture the story that its spatiality is telling us. We have isolated, out of the available literature, two recurring patterns that stand out in descriptions of the nature of love, two themes that bear a specific relevance for the field of spatial practices.

Firstly, many scholars have been describing love as a form of *opening towards promising potentialities*. <sup>(Solomon,1983)(Beck,1990)(Paz,1993)(Badiou,2013)(May,2011;2019)(Vaneigem, 1967)</sup> Characterised as a glimpse <sup>(Girard,2013)(May,2019)</sup> or a glance <sup>(Alberoni,1979)</sup>, the emotional experience of love can be conceived as a revelatory process where the lover sees in the beloved (a living being, an object, a place or an abstraction) the promise of a valued *other* world. Non-reachable, this different reality varies in characteristics and designations but seems to always point towards what Simon May identifies in his *New Understanding of an Ancient Emotion* as a sense of “ontological rootedness”, “a home in the world” <sup>(May,2019)</sup>. In his words:

“We love only what we experience as offering us a promise of home in that particular world in which we yearn to be grounded— that very particular world in which we feel we can most vividly exist: in which we see the real field of possibilities for our flourishing.” <sup>(May,2019)</sup>

The poet Octavio Paz calls it “the other side” <sup>(Paz,1993)</sup>, others have been describing it as “a private cosmos” <sup>(Beck,1990)</sup>, “an escape from the limits of the given” <sup>(Lindholm,2006)</sup>, “our place in the world” <sup>(Solomon,1983)</sup>, “beyond the threshold of our temporary bounded life” <sup>(Simmel,1971)</sup>, “some new and ultimate realm from which the old mortality and imperfections have been effaced” <sup>(Jameson, 1975)</sup>, “a world where life can inscribe itself and where a story is possible” <sup>(Girard,2013)</sup>. This unapproachable universe <sup>(May,2019)</sup> is being typically put in opposition with a state where the characteristics of the world presented by love are absent or lacking and to which the new reality is responding to. Thinkers talk about a position of exile <sup>(May,2019)</sup>, depression <sup>(Alberoni,1979)</sup> alienation <sup>(Badiou,2013)</sup>, ambiguity <sup>(Beck,1990)</sup> or disarray <sup>(Solomon,1983)</sup> from which lovers glimpse at an alternative that contains the



pathways out of this state and into a world that materialises the conditions to deepen their sense of existing. In fact, as May advances, not only is love pointing to alternatives *out* of alienation, but it is also “deepen[ing] our sensitivity to alienation, for to glimpse a promise of home is to become more aware of our distance from it—and of the pain of that distance.” (May,2019) This world of love is also described in its capacities to alter our relationship with time and space. While some have suggested that love is the structure of time itself (Rovelli,2017), others have seen it as a form of warping of the temporal dimension. In common language, we talk of when *time stands still*, Paz speaks of a moment where “here is there” (Paz,1993) and when “now is forever” (Paz,1993) while Proust suggests that “love is space and time made perceptible to the heart.” (Proust,1923[1999]) The type of time created by love appears to be described in ways that approach the more qualitative and non-linear experiences of it. Closer to what 19th century thinkers like Bergson or Benjamin were theorising as a *durée* or a *messianic time*: moments when the past, the present and the future merge into one expansive awareness, where memories, hopes and desires become one and when we glimpse at a world made of events instead of things. Equally, love affects the perception of space by tincturing it with the aura of the loved one. In Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*, for example, Frédéric Moreau constructs his whole conception of Paris from his inexhaustible love for Madame Arnoux. The city fluctuates and transforms according to his emotion. Streets, rooms and windows take meaning through their association with the loved one, while events and revolutions are but the punctuations of his emotional journey. (Flaubert,1869[2013]) A capacity noted by Walter Benjamin in his book *One Way Street*:

“A highly confusing neighbourhood, a network of streets that I had avoided for years, was clarified for me at a stroke, when one day a beloved person moved in there. It was as if a searchlight was set up in his window and dissected the area with clusters of light.” (Benjamin, 1928 [2009])

The second recurring pattern that is of importance for spatial practices is observable through love’s fundamental relationship with alterity: as a form of *training ground to grow sensible to the otherness of the world*. A perspective best exemplified in what Martin Buber calls an *I-Thou* relationship: a state where we dwell in love, in acceptance of the singularity, self-existence and separateness of our surroundings; in opposition to an *I-It* relation where we perceive the world as a controllable extension of the Self. (Buber,1937) The psychologist Donald

Winnicott in his observance of play in early childhood comes to similar conceptions in his description of love as the *potential space* between the Self and the Other. (Winnicott,1971) Through the lifelong process of coming to term with the loss of omnipotence — the illusion arising at birth that we are an all-powerful entity and that the rest of the world exists for us — we grow sensible to the cues that our environment, and especially other human beings, are giving us. We learn to adapt our worldview to accept the unpredictable ways that others might be or act. This mutual recognition of the independent existence of others is one of the phenomena that shapes what Winnicott recognises as love. Enacted through what he calls a *subtle interplay*, he saw love as arising in this *potential space*, in between subjectivities, for the reciprocal acknowledgement of our differences. (Boyd,1968)(Winnicott,1971)(Metcalfe and Game, 2008)(Nussbaum, 2015)

This view of love as an acceptance of the otherness of reality finds an echo in the thoughts of figures as diverse as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida and more recently Martha Nussbaum who refers to the process of loving as a ‘Yes’, an *all-affirming yes* (Nietzsche,1882 [1974]) “that wants nothing to be different [than it is or will be]” (Nietzsche,1908 [2017]), a “yes to our being in common together [...] that does not reduce the otherness of the Other” (Derrida in Padgaonkar,1997), a “yes to a world of reciprocity [...] yes to the imperfection”. (Nussbaum,2015) The French philosopher Alain Badiou talks of love as “the unfolding of the world through the prism of our difference” (Badiou,2009), as “the possibility for us to make a positive, affirmative and creative experience of difference”, (Badiou,2009) while Emmanuel Levinas talks of love as a relationship that does not “neutralize alterity but preserves it”. (Levinas,1979) Most notably, a lineage of feminist thinkers have been making the case for an understanding of love through the acknowledgement of the existence and independence of two distinct realities. From Simone De Beauvoir’s famous statement that no love is “authentic” without a “mutual recognition of two liberties” (De Beauvoir,1949[2011]) to Luce Irigaray’s proposed semantic reconstruction of “I-love-you” as “I-love-to-you”, feminists have been advocating for a conception of love that does not reduce the beloved to a sole object of love, but rather that sees the emotion as a process to celebrate its otherness, its self-existence and its potential. (Irigaray,1996)

Combined, these two understandings of love, first as a (1) glimpse towards promising potentialities in the face of alienation but also as a (2) recognition, acceptance and experience of the essential alterity of the world are, we are arguing, the driving forces that construct the urban atmosphere of love. Like a push

and pull that balances itself in a forceful embrace, they generate in their meeting a burning equilibrium. A world of possibilities and differences that materialises itself in delight.

While the study of other themes related to love — like intimacy, sexuality and gender — has been widespread in spatial practices from at least the 90s onwards, the consideration of the *emotional* dimension of love has been virtually absent from the field. Even if the study of topophilic connections to places (love of places) has had significant attention — Bachelard <sup>(Bachelard,1971)</sup>, Tuan <sup>(Tuan,1990)</sup> or Gibson <sup>(Gibson,2010)</sup> as typical examples — the consideration of the emotion as a generative force for the production of spaces finds itself only in a few punctual occurrences in literature. Aside from the Palassmaa quote mentioned above, and isolated allusions in Romantic <sup>(Novalis,1798[1997])</sup>, Surrealist <sup>(Breton,1937)</sup> or Situationist <sup>(Vaneigem,2010)</sup> texts, three other phenomenological explorations arise as secluded conceptual islands within the field. David Krell, building on the views of Heidegger, Bataille and Merleau-Ponty, proposed a shift in architectural theory by identifying a potential alternative etymological root in the word architecture — which he rebaptised *Archeticture* in reference to its plausible origin in the Greek word *tikten* meaning “to reproduce” or “to love”. Through this semantic reconstruction, Krell challenges the tenacity of architecture to focus on technological imperatives and brings to light a view which places emphasis on otherness and emotionality. Perez-Gomez, in his *Built Upon Love*, draws, in an impervious articulation, a picture of architecture and love as both sitting at the intersection of poetics and ethics. He defends, with historical arguments, that architecture has always been and will continue to be constructed with love, which he identifies as existing between “[...] the architect’s wish to design a beautiful world and architecture’s imperative to provide a better place for society”. <sup>(Pérez Gómez, 2008)</sup> Finally, Andrea Wheeler, in her analysis of a potential inclusion of Luce Irigaray’s philosophies on love, has brought to light one the clearest and the most thorough investigation into a possible consideration of the notion of love within the field of architecture. In her thesis *With Place Love Begins* (to which the title of the current text is a reference towards), she proposes a novel approach to architectural design which would “[...] respond to and initiate modes of living that recognise a feminine subjectivity and hence a radical sexual difference allowing two subjectivities.” <sup>(Wheeler, 2002)</sup>

The history of love in the West has been running in parallel and has occupied a pivotal and dialectical position with a series of major social changes that

shaped and defined the way we live our lives today; transformations that have not only organised our intimate lives, but have also configured our cities and streets and how we respond to them. By looking at the spatial marks left by three significant shifts in the history of the emotion — spiritual, social and political — we will be tracing how a contemporary Western conception of an urban atmosphere of love has come into being.

## FROM IDEALISATION TO SENSIBILITY



In the transfer from a love directed to an idealised  
acosmic God to one directed to earthly individuals,  
a new aesthetic, a new sensibility, takes form.

Fouquet, J., 1452. *The Right Hand Of God  
Protecting The Faithful Against The Demons.*

Shottel Boys, T., 1839. *Sainte Chapelle, Paris —  
Picturesque Architecture In Paris.*

Finding its roots in the 11th century, culminating in the late 18th and still in process, a radical transformation of our emotional lives has been restructuring the way we live. Leaving “no corner of our ethics, our imagination, or our daily life untouched” (Lewis, 1936), this revolution next to which “[...] the renaissance is a mere ripple” (Lewis, 1936) has been described as “[...] the most important mutation of human feeling and spiritual consciousness” (Campbell and Moyers, 1988). This change was the development of a different way of experiencing love: what would become known as romantic love from the 19th century onwards.

The roots of this turn have most commonly been located in the societal changes occurring in the South of France at the beginning of the last millennia. (Lewis, 1936)(Singer, 1984)(Paz, 1993)(May, 2011)(Seebach, 2017) Known as *fin'amor* (later re-baptised courtly love) (Moore, 1979) and deeply influenced by the literature and customs of the Islamic world (Hickman, 2014) (Von Grunebaum, 1952), this literary tradition, propagated by a group of poets known as troubadours, was proposing a shift in the way that men and women would relate to each other. They were praising, through fiction, for what they were considering a new *refined* (*fin'*) manner of loving, one that is worthy from someone of a court (courtly), which they were putting in opposition with what they were perceiving as a copulative unrefined way of doing so in towns and villages. (Paz, 1993) Out of the many changes that this has brought, the major shift that was going to transform the way we relate to each other, and even the way that we perceive ourselves, was in the manner the Other (in this case, the woman) was now starting to be considered. In a chicken and egg scenario, the troubadours, by mythologising the Other as more than an object, recognising



its self-existent, mysterious and distant reality, were opening the doors for the mythologisation of the Self <sup>(Paz,1993)</sup>: a phenomenon that Colin Morris identified as contributing in the “discovery” of the modern individual. <sup>(Morris,1987)</sup> It is in this tension between the irreconcilable gap between the Self and the Other and the *celebration of that gap* that was going to grow what would eventually become known as romantic love. Key societal and spatial conditions were necessary to bring about the circumstances for this change to occur, which we can find even more saliently represented in the full expansion of this way of loving 800 years later.

As a consequence of the industrialisation and urbanisation of the late 18th century, the growing cities become gradually beacons of possibilities and places of difference. Young people distance themselves from their town of origin to reach the centralities, gaining an unprecedented level of autonomy from religious, familial, economic and social ties. Everything that had been providing guarantees and security was now being traded against opportunities for personal development. <sup>(Seebach,2019)</sup> With the affluence and convergence of people from everywhere, cities become places where one could now roam free with a certain degree of anonymity. From this newly acquired freedom — acting as a liberator from institutional pressures — the responsibility for finding a partner was now gradually transferred to the individual. People were now faced with the liberty *and* the pressure of deciding who they wanted to love and who they wanted to be. <sup>(Seebach,2019)</sup> This growing emphasis on choice, not only concerning relationships, but also at the level of careers or spirituality, accentuated the importance attributed to personal decisions. What was before treated as trivial matter, like emotions, personality and intimate relationships became increasingly valuable assets to establish a place in the world and to find a partner. <sup>(Seebach,2017)</sup> Out of the density, diversity and possibility of city life, the Western conception of what would become known as romantic love was born.

However, as observed by authors such as Christopher Lasch <sup>(Lasch,1977)</sup>, Eva Illouz <sup>(Illouz,2013)</sup>, Anthony Giddens <sup>(Giddens,1993)</sup> or Richard Sennett <sup>(Sennett,1977)</sup>, the now dominating private world came to erode public life which led to processes that they refer to as “the transformation of intimacy” <sup>(Giddens,1993)</sup>, “the polarisation of intimacy” <sup>(Sennett,1970)</sup> or “the tyranny of intimacy” <sup>(Illouz,2013)</sup>. From what Sennett attributes to a predominance of narcissistic behaviours, intimate relationships like love got relegated to the realm of the private, which left the public world drab <sup>(Sennett,1977)</sup> and the intimate sphere all ruling. <sup>(Illouz,2013)</sup>

Meanwhile, the imaginary was doing its magic. The “*only weapon we have against the real*” <sup>(Gaultier,1892[2006])</sup> was constructing love-fueled mental alternatives, populating itself with marks of promising possibilities and symbols of the recognition of the alterity of the world: the contemporary urban atmosphere of love was coming into being.

Correlating in time with the full expansion of romantic love <sup>(May,2019)</sup> and the perspectival shift of the late 18th century, where questions became “typically anthropological rather than theological in character: [from] ‘How could God permit this?’ [to] ‘How could men act this way?’”, <sup>(Berger,1967)</sup> a distinctively modern aesthetic category <sup>(Ruskin,1849)(Landow,2015)</sup> entered the picture by carving its way between the Beautiful and the Sublime. At the centre of a century-long debate, the Picturesque positioned itself between the complacency of beauty <sup>(Price,1794[2015])</sup> and the astonishment of sublimity, by celebrating curiosity as its main motive. <sup>(Price,1794[2015])</sup> Interfering with established ideals, it shook the foundations of aesthetics and triggered a feud, referred to as the *Picturesque Controversy*, about which Ruskin would state decades later that “probably no word in the language, has been the subject of so frequent or so prolonged dispute yet none remained more vague in their acceptance”. <sup>(Ruskin,1849)</sup> The reason why the Picturesque has been so contested, we advance, is that the concept finds its roots at the heart of much more fundamental concerns than the layout of gardens it is commonly associated to. Its celebration “of variety, of intricacy, of the connection of a building with nature, of advance and recess, swelling and sinking, and of contrasts of texture” <sup>(Pevsner,1947)</sup>, illustrates and symbolises, we argue, the transfer — still underway — from the uniform and reassuring *grands récits* (metanarratives) <sup>(Lyotard,1979 [2010])</sup> of the religious traditions to the diversity, complexity and unpredictability of the *petits récits* (little narratives) <sup>(Lyotard,1979 [2010])</sup> of human realities. A process in accordance with Durkheim <sup>(Alexander,1988)</sup> and his observation of societies’ reassignment of emotions and their cultural manifestation in the transference of God-directed experiences to human-directed ones.

Embodying the shift from “idealisation to sensibility”, <sup>(Townsend,1997)</sup> the Picturesque complexified beauty and sublimity by projecting a world that started to picture its objects as subjects. An anthropocentric inclination that gets exemplified in the numerous examples where the key debaters of the Picturesque — Price, Knight and Gilpin — use human traits to image their views on the nature of picturesqueness and their feelings towards it. <sup>(Ross,1987)</sup> As observed in the next

century by Ruskin, the Picturesque was gaining “its effect not, as with beauty, from a figuring forth of divine qualities, but from human associations.” (Landow, 2015) Or, more recently, as Irénée Scalbert imaged it, the Picturesque made “[b]iography become the new mythology. [...] For the first time, perhaps, the ideal was thought to reside neither in religion nor in art but in life itself.” (Scalbert, 2018) This new aesthetic was praising the enlivening friction of everyday life over the dull and monotone repose of heavenly orders. (Price, 1794 [2015])

Most notably, it did so by making the comparison between two different ‘types’ of love to which these qualities were responding to. When comparing “the smooth and tranquil scene of a beautiful lake” and the “wild, abrupt, and noisy one of a picturesque river”, Uvedale Price, in its *Essay on the Picturesque as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Price, 1794 [2015]) invites his reader to consider, by “reflect[ing] on their sensation”, the distinctiveness of the two experiences and that “nothing but the poverty of language makes us call two sensations so distinct from each other by the common name of pleasure”. He continues by placing the feeling instigated by beauty, that “mild and equal sunshine of the soul which warms and cheers” where one is “disposed to every act of kindness and benevolence, to *love* and cherish all around him” in comparison — in the same paragraph — with the emotions triggered by the sight of the Picturesque, “the source of our most active and lively pleasure [...] eager, hurrying, impetuous [...] agitated” identifying it “with our most tumultuous emotions”, such as “*love*, armed with flames, with envenomed shafts, with every instrument of irritation.”

This polysemous use of the word *love* is not accidental. It points at the core of the tensions at play during this pivotal era and of which we are still grappling with the reverberations. In the wake of what Max Weber called the gradual disenchantment of the world — the progressive collapse of the social structures (religious institutions) that had been formerly channelling love and spirituality — we witness a piecemeal and saw-toothed “psychologisation of religion and a sacralisation of psychology”. (Hanegraaff, 1998) Symbols, imageries and rituals get routinely disengaged from their religious heritage and come to be reassigned to infuse secular experiences. (Landy, 2009) These newly re-enchanted phenomena then rise to become, in some cases, expressions of supreme value and guide the production of artistic, architectural and literary works, reflecting and re-enacting the deeply-rooted human emotions that the religious narratives were formerly responding to. (Riis and Woodhead, 2010) One of the most distinct instances of this process being the redirection of the intense fear and awe induced by the

belief in Satan and God into the artistically produced horror and grandeur of on one side, the Grotesque or Gothic aesthetics, (Campbell, 2005) (Riis and Woodhead, 2010) and on the other, the Sublime and Beautiful ideals (Burke, 1757 [2015]); both translating the emotions of danger, terror, admiration or reverence that one experiences in the face of an all-mighty (and all-controlling) God or Devil.

In parallel to these divine aesthetics of control, the Picturesque appears to have formed as a translation of the transference of another emotion: love. From a process that Simon May sees as the gradual transfer from the 11th century’s ‘*God is love*’ perspective to a ‘*Love is God*’ mindset to the contemporary ‘*Love is love*’ ethos, the primary object of love passes from God to the subject (another human). (May, 2011) Arising in the collapse of divine certainties, the Picturesque can be seen as an example of what the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard would call in the 20th century, a “playful engagement with [...] the alternatives that [emerge] in the space created by the questioning of metanarratives.” (Lyotard, 1979 [2010]) No more divine, love’s new earthly object furnished its imaginary with the mystery, capacity and presence of its own perspective; the irregularity, plurality and roughness of individualities; and, in the wake of a disenchanted world, the warmth, chance and magic of nature: a world of possibility, difference and delight that would set the basis for the formation of the contemporary urban atmosphere of love.

## SHE'S LOST CONTROL



A transforming spatial world accompanies a changing social world. Women defy the control of domesticity and the image of the waiting women by engaging themselves in spaces at the limits of control.

Kitty Lange Kielland, 1881. *Paris Interior*.

From the presumed origin of the Western conception of romantic love in the 11th century until today, the changes in the status and freedom of women have not only shaped the way we relate to each other, but have also transformed how we construct space and engage with it. Indeed, as some have suggested, no history of love can exist without a history of the emancipation of women. <sup>(Paz,1993)</sup> <sup>(Solomon,1983)(Ackerman,1995)(Nehring,2009)(Ferguson & Jónasdóttir, 2015)(Cannone,2020)</sup> As the essayist Belinda Cannone states it, “they are both sides of the same coin, they reinforce each other”. <sup>(Cannone,2020, my translation)</sup> Through acts of refusal, liberation and vindication, feminists and protofeminists have been defending, amongst many other claims, the right for women (and all) to be present, active, and safe in the public realm. One of the ways that the movement have been supported, advances Aaron Betsky in *Building Sex*, <sup>(Betsky,1997)</sup> is through the nurturing and control by women of heterotopias: these spaces outside of the everyday that materialises the conditions for an alternate reality to exist. <sup>(Foucault, 1986)</sup> The urban atmosphere of love, we advance, has been partly constructed in that way: as a mental counterspace in the face of patriarchal oppression in the public realm.

One of its most emblematic figures can be seen in the tale of Flaubert’s heroine: Emma Bovary. Her story is typically read as the one of a delusional woman corrupted by her reading of love novels that tries to escape her marriage and countryside life through adultery and consumerism. Both tendencies that lead to her death by suicide crushed under the weight of debt. She is commonly taken as a symbol of modernity representing the escapist attitude of modern beings and their tendency to be obsessed with what they are not.

However, this reading leaves aside another, more sensible, understanding of the story: a reading that cut to the core of Flaubert's cynical long battle with his repressed romanticism. (Doering,1981)

What is often put aside in the analysis of her tale is the manipulative schemes of the masculine characters surrounding her. Could it be possible that her reality had been imposed on her? That "all her immediate surroundings, the wearisome country, the middle-class imbeciles, the mediocrity of existence" (Flaubert,1856[2003]) was not what she had wanted? Instead of being this symbol of continuous flight and bottomless fulfilment, could her construction of an imaginary be understood as a glimpse towards a better reality, towards a world outside of oppression? Could her reading of love stories be seen as revelatory instead of corrupting? Could her romanticisation, often invoked pejoratively, be an enlightenment rather than an illusion? Could her tragedy, her refusal and resistance to her condition, be seen as an *acceptation* of reality in all it has to offer. After all, in common language, don't we refer to romanticisation as the imagination of a situation as better than it is in reality, the process of creating another world (from the existing one) that appears improved to our eyes and other senses? As the sociologist Dominique Depenne clarifies it: "what 'real life' is, as it is imposed on Emma Bovary, is not 'real reality' but the 'real' of a dominant class." (Depenne,2006; My Translation) From this perspective, Emma, instead of the hysterical role that we typically assign to her, can be understood as the:

"[...] heroine by which a breach opens in the dominant, where she acts as a crack in the "state of what is", opening to a possible. [...] by resisting the real, by refusing to fall under its control, by proceeding to a displacement of the real thanks to the fantasy and the imagination." (Depenne,2006; My Translation)

The refusal of Emma was channelled through love in an atmosphere that she inhabited and furnished. To liberate herself from the conversations of her husband that were "as boring as a street pavement" (Flaubert,1856[2003]), she constructed a world, "more vague than the ocean, glimmer[ing] before [her] eyes in an atmosphere of vermilion". (Flaubert,1856[2003]) This alternate reality "stretched, as far as eye could see, [in] an immense land of joys and passions" (Flaubert,1856[2003]) fabricated from "the attractive phantasmagoria of sentimental realities" (Flaubert,1856[2003]). Enlighten from her vision of another world, she wonders: "did not love, like Indian plants, need a special soil, a particular temperature?" (Flaubert,1856[2003]) She resisted the real with love which fuelled her imaginary. As she

would sit in her countryside kitchen, she would pick a piece of cloth from her distant lover, inhale the "breath of love [that] had passed over the stitches on the canvas" (Flaubert,1856[2003]) and on a plan laid out on a table:

"[...] with the tip of her finger on the map she walked about the capital. She went up the boulevards, stopping at every turning, between the lines of the streets, in front of the white squares that represented the houses. At last, she would close the lids of her weary eyes, and see in the darkness the flaring in the wind and the steps of carriages lowered with much noise before the peristyles of theatres." (Flaubert,1856[2003])

Love and the City can be seen for Emma not as an escape, but as a *potential space*, another place, a heterotopia that she controls and where she engages fully in an act of refusal. While she can be considered the emblematic symbol of it, characters appealed by the City as a place of love *and* possibility is manifold in literature. The obvious examples from the French Capital would include Rastignac of Balzac, Claude Lantier of Zola, George Duroy of Maupassant, all the characters of Eric Rohmer movies and, from a Usonian viewpoint, the lineage of films featuring Audrey Hepburn in the Capital. This reputation of Paris as the Capital of Love *and* as the Capital of Modernity (Harvey,2006), exemplifies the paradoxical nature of the modern world, the inextricable ties it maintains with love and the role that urban life occupies with both. Contrary to what might be assumed, this image has not been constructed from scratch by Hollywoodian efforts. Mythologised as such for centuries across the world (DeJean, 2015)(Kalifa, 2018) (Downie, 2015), this international charm around Paris — this Parisland (Dalle-Vacche,1992) — epitomised in the 2006 *Paris je t'aime*, Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* and countless other cultural depictions, can be again easily reduced to an escapist flight from reality: as a weak, corrupted and blinded impulse. Rather, as it has been for Emma a way to offset reality in order to present alternatives to patriarchal oppression, could this aura placed around Paris be hiding clues? Behind its capitalist veil and despite its thick post-modern coatings, could love and its imaginative geography (Said,1979) be condensing pathways of liberation from the experience of the alienating conditions of modernity?

Like Emma Bovary, other women have been constructing their paths out of systems of oppression. Little by little, most predominantly from the 17th century onwards (DeJean,2014), women have been challenging the long-established iconography of the waiting women, (Kern,1994)(Ackerman,1995) and find ways to mate-





A man watches a woman walk away in the street from his balcony. The urban transformations of Paris of the 19th Century afford woman to navigate the public realm more safely. Their presence infuse the romantic imaginary as they control and project the potential space in which they engage themselves.

Gustave Caillebotte, 1875. *Jeune Homme À Sa Fenêtre*.

realise their will and integrate parts of the public realm of the French Capital. (Dejean,2014) (Kern,1994)(Kalifa,2018) As the historian Dominique Kalifa observed it, through multiple social changes, including the gradual development of public spaces, an expanding economic autonomy, the improvement of transport and the gradual loosening of masculine, familial and religious control, women are able to progressively be more active and engage publicly in love encounters. (Kalifa,2018) By entering the public realm through spaces such as, balconies, gardens, parks, streets, terraces, bridges, trains, metros or beaches, they infuse the romantic imaginary with novel urban artefacts which are still until today emblematic elements of the spatiality of love. (Kalifa,2018)

It would be easy to understand this connection only in relation to the gaze of men. A typical reading of it would be that women being present in more places, the hunting ground of men would therefore grow, which in turn would be translated in a celebration of predatory behaviour. An understanding that would be not totally untrue, considering that the list of spaces above could equally be found, almost correspondingly, in any paper investigating women and fear in public space. (Tandogan and Ilhan, 2016)(Beebeejaun,2016) However, this view would be as reductionist as the feminising reading of Madame Bovary as a delusional escapist. These spaces are indeed, *in reality*, places where women — and others — can often experience an atmosphere of fear and they are as well, unacceptably, the setting, *in reality*, of an array of horrendous crimes and menacing behaviours. And indeed, the reason for this fear is mainly due to the historical inadmissible conduct of men in public space. However, is an atmosphere of love an atmosphere of terror? When we *individually generate mentally* an imaginary street that we personally associate with an emotional experience of love, do we experience a sensation of fear or a feeling of comfort and enchantment? It is this important distinction between a perceived and a simulated atmosphere that is of particular relevance for architecture and urban design. A spatial simulation of an emotional experience of love has the capacity to transport our minds in a world that tweaks the perceived reality and presents it with a vision of it that contains the clues for a fearless and unrestrained experience of the real.

In his study of the space of contemporary romantic comedies and its correspondence with Shakespeare's theatre, Celestino Deleyto highlights the role of imagination at the individual and cultural level by tracing the function occupied by the atmosphere of love. (Deleyto, 2011) Uncovering its association with the comic, Deleyto argues that the atmosphere of love acts as a:

“[...] transformation of the everyday reality of human relationship by constructing a special space outside history (but very close to it). [...] allow[ing] the spectator to glimpse a better world, a world which is not governed by inhibitions and repressions but is instead characterised by a freer, more optimistic expression of love.”

(Deleyto, 2011)

As he underlines it, this world of love functions similarly to the world of the carnival (Deleyto, 2011) — as studied by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. (Bakhtin, 1965)

In the same way that the atmosphere of the carnival, and its grotesque aesthetic, acts as a space of resistance for the momentary liberation from the oppression of the Church and the State, the atmosphere of love proposes an “antidote against the sexual and affective frustrations of everyday life” (Deleyto, 2011): a counterspace in the face of patriarchal induced fear. Like the carnival, it acts mentally as a liminal space — *a space at the limits of control* (Sendra and Sennett, 2020) — which assembles itself with a collection of elements (balcony, terraces, bridges, etc.) where the typical hierarchies of gender or social distinctions are lifted: “a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (Turner, 1967). Spaces that are not only the sites of the formulation of new social structures between genders, but also ambiguous buffer zones between private and public life. Elements that mediate the relations between our intimate and exposed selves: where we experiment with novel ways to be. They can be understood in the light of what Aaron Betsky refers to as *Queer Spaces* (Betsky, 1997): not quite ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, they engage us *in between* dichotomies. “Space[s] of difference, where one realizes that desire is not biological destiny, and neither is a social role. [...] An escape from the plays of power.” (Betsky, 1997) Spaces that propose a detour out of the imperatives of everyday life and from the normativity of the ordinary and into an exploration at the margins of the uncharted possibilities of the real. As phrased by the theorist Svetlana Boym:

“Love experiences move between the citadels of inner freedom and official “private properties” built into the public architecture of society, and from there into semi-concealed spaces of secret encounters, balconies, bridges, and side and back alleys, to the hyperbolic planes of amorous imagination. It can become an adventure in agnostic world-making, a tender cocreation of potential spaces.” (Boym, 2010)



René Clair : Sous les toits de Paris, 1930



Eric Rohmer : Nadja à Paris, 1964



Marcel Carné : Les enfants du paradis, 1945



Doisneau : Les coiffeuses au soleil, 1966



Julien Duvivier : Sous le ciel de Paris, 1950



Eric Rohmer : Les nuits de la pleine lune 1984



Jean-Luc Godard : À bout de souffle, 1960



Yann Samuell : Jeux d'enfants, 2003



Agnes Varda : Cléo 5 à 7, 1962



Céline Sciamma : Bande de Filles, 2014

Throughout the 20th century, women are progressively more active in the public realm. The above films showcase their emancipation at the spatial level from the doorstep to the open space.

Similarly, as the critic Deborah Jermyn advances it in her analysis of romantic comedies, the urban atmosphere of love is “where lovers might ‘lose control’; or perhaps more accurately, that the conventions, formalities and tensions that feature so heavily in our everyday lives might lose their control of us”. <sup>(Jermyn,2013)</sup> A space not only out of ourselves but also out of what *restrain* ourselves. Where the boundaries between the public and the private are blurred by a multiplication of *in-betweens* that amplify our options for different ways to be. By celebrating the multitude of opportunities for different degrees of intimacy (and safety), the urban atmosphere of love acts as a counter-agent against what Richard Sennett refers to as the polarisation of intimacy. <sup>(Sennett,1977)</sup> Instead, a plurality of intimacies where the ambiguity and potential of who one can be are merged in a world of possibility, difference and delight.



## STREETS OF LOVE STREETS OF RESISTANCE



Symbols of resistance, emblems of liminal moments of Western history, like narrow streets or cobblestones, come to infuse the imaginary of love to become manifestations of its sacred reality.

Barricade In A Small Street During The Paris Commune. 1871.  
Couple Dancing In The Street. 1950.

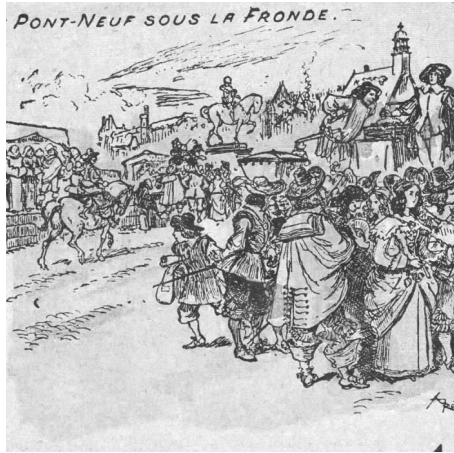
*“Really being in love means really wanting to live in a different world.”*

(Vaneigem, 1967[2017])

Recognised as one of the great subversive acts of Western culture, (Vaneigem,1967) (Alberoni,1979)(Paz,1993)(Chabot,2008)(Hardt,2011)(Illouz,2013)(Nussbaum,2015)(Horvat,2016)(Grossi and West, 2018)

(May,2019) love has unsurprisingly been infusing its spatial dimension with many symbols of resistance of the past centuries. Aside from the feminist revolution that has populated the potential space of love with leaps of spatial liberation, other elements of other efforts of defiance have also been integrated into the emotional atmosphere over time. While we have seen that the urban world of love is a compound of different liminal *spaces* at the limits of control, we can notice that different liminal *moments* — times of change in between ‘what was’ and ‘what could be’ — have also been furnishing its spatiality. Iconic physical symbols of pivotal events of Western history have integrated the urban atmosphere of love the same way the conquered spaces of feminist efforts have been doing it: by playing central roles in transitions when novel worlds were opening new possibilities for different ways to be. Elements such as bridges, narrow streets, cafés, trees or paving stones can be taken as exemplary models of this tendency. Today, they simultaneously represent emblematic components of the urban atmosphere of love *and* central spatial agents of liminal moments of Western history. While these elements can find examples of their implication in multiple social upheavals throughout the West, the French capital can be taken as an exemplary setting, combining many of them in their involvement in subversive events like the Fronde, the French revolution or May 68. (See image annotations)





**Bridges:** the Pont-Neuf, considered from the events of The Fronde of 1648 as a “breeding ground for civil disorder”<sup>(Dejean, 2014)</sup> has forced royalty to forbid gatherings on the bridge in the 17th century. The name *frondeur*, in reference to the *Frondeur du Pont-Neuf*, is still used today in French and English to describe political nonconformists.<sup>(Dejean, 2014)</sup>



**Cafés:** standing on top of a table of the Café de Foy in July 1789, Camille Desmoulins launches the efforts and gathers the crowd to storm the Bastille, the event that would start the century-long period of transition out of the Ancien Regime. The Parisian Café and its terraces, implicated in many other subversive events, is still considered a hotbed of revolutionary thoughts and movements.<sup>(Dejean, 2014)</sup>

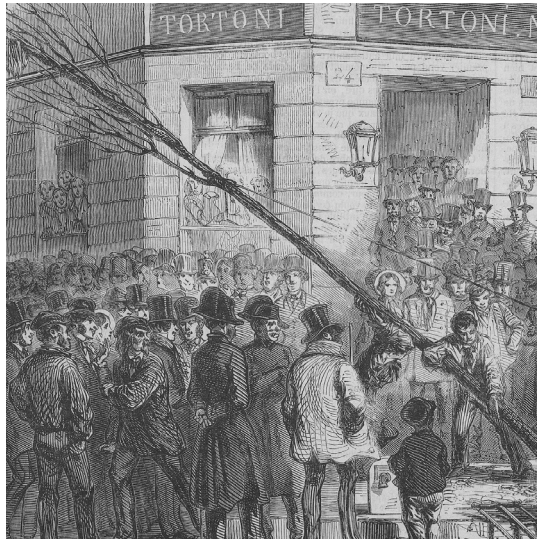


**Narrow streets:** the barricades of the Revolution of 1848, emblems of 19th century resistance, have been used throughout the century and beyond. Being more efficient in streets of narrow width as a tactic of political defiance, the widening of roads, most notoriously performed by Napoleon III and the baron Haussmann, has been used as counter-revolutionary methods and has transformed narrow streets as icons of subversion.<sup>(Omniveth, 2019)</sup>



**Paving Stones:** immortalised in the famous slogan “*Sous les pavés, la plage!*” (Under the paving stones, the beach!), the Parisian *pavé* served during the French student revolt of May 1968 or during the French Revolution as an emblem of liberation. The blocs of stone paving the capital have been transformed as icons of optimism for what could be: symbols of defiance and hope.<sup>(LePoint, 2016) (Le pavé parisien à l'épreuve du temps, 2020)</sup>





**Trees:** Since the French Revolution, the planting of *Arbres de la Liberté* (Liberty Trees) are seen as symbols of freedom and revolution. Through the 19th century, kings chronically decapitate trees as an act of iconoclasm against the ideas of the revolutionaries. On their side, when in power, the subversives lined again the streets with thousands of trees to symbolise the possibilities of the future world to be.

(Coudou, 1975) (Lawrence, 1988) (Fureix, 2012)

Featuring emblematic elements of the urban atmosphere of love, this small sample of significant transitional moments of French political history — and their spatial attributes — is showing what appears as a propensity of love to absorb symbols charged with meaning that correspond to its nature. Following the many comparisons of the emotion as a form of myth or religion for the Western world (Lewis, 2013[1936])(Solomon, 1983)(Weber, 1946)(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1990)(Illouz, 1997)(Lindholm, 2006)(May, 2011)(Seebach, 2017)(May, 2019), these elements can be considered as an expression of what the historian Mircea Eliade referred to as *hierophanies*: manifestations of sacred reality. (Eliade, 1959) Crystallised as symbols of possibility and subversion, these urban artefacts — and others — seem to have coalesced and formed a compound that materialises in space the ideals of human potentiality that modern love praises. The same way that religions have constructed image-ries and metaphors from objects and spaces loaded with holy significance about another acosmic world to be, human love has consolidated elements of the public realm that celebrate what is sacred to itself, that is to say: earthly possibilities and human differences. In the words of the sociologist Eva Illouz:

“Love projects an aura of transgression and both promises and demands a better world. [...] It contains elements of transgression as well as a mechanism designed to re-establish the “normal” order of things. [It] has been and continues to be the cornerstone of a powerful Utopian vision because it re-enacts symbolically rituals of opposition to the social order through inversion of hierarchies.” (Illouz, 1997)

The analogy between love and political resistance is not new and the collation of both topics together is manifold in literature. Throughout history, as observed by the political philosopher Srečko Horvat in his study of the radicality of love, no reinvention of the world has happened without a reinvention of love (Horvat, 2016): the two are linked together. Illouz calls it the *magma of social change*: (Illouz cited in Horvat, 2016) without the activation and transformation of its structure, no shifts in social relations can occur. Francesco Alberoni, in his analysis of the correspondence between love and revolutionary moments, describes it as an “exploration of the possible from the impossible, an attempt of the imaginary to impose itself on the existing” (Alberoni, 1979). He describes love as the fundamental defying drive of institutional establishment: a power analogous to the verve animating collective movements that acts as a “dynamic life force, capable of free, constant,

surprising transformation” (Alberoni,1979) that embodies the desire “to reconstruct society, to see the world with a new eye” (Alberoni,1979). The transformative imagery of the urban atmosphere of love seems to respond to this radical dimension of the emotion — this insurrectionary character (Paz,1993) — by combining symbols of resistance to compose an expression of renewal in the face of the oppressive conditions of the real. A simulated atmosphere of streets of love can be seen, in that sense, as an atmosphere of resistance: an assembled imaginary that celebrates the “smallest social unit capable of defying the system.” (Alberoni,1979)

As Illouz observed it, love is a space where “[...] gender divisions, social identities, and class inequalities are negated. [...] for it suspends and reverses not only everyday rules and norms but the spheres of production and reproduction as well.” (Illouz,1997) She takes the example of the emphasis put on liminal times as one prime representation of this subversive character. By celebrating dawn and dusk for example — moments of transition between the profitable time of the day and the ‘squandered’ time of the night — the atmosphere of love ritualises a world “on the margins of the productive and reproductive time of society”. (Illouz,1997) A space, as May or Beck would advance it, “where we resist the spirit of the market” (May,2019), where we transgress the imperatives of capitalism and project an alternate world, *along* its paradoxical nature. (Bell,1998)

Again, the distinction between a perceived and simulated atmosphere is helpful to be recalled here. While the actual spaces that we associate archetypally with love have been *in reality* heavily colonised by the spirit of capitalism, exemplified in the analyses of Barbara Penner about Niagara Falls for example (Penner,2009), the imagery that we individually generate to represent an atmosphere that we attribute to a feeling of love has not necessarily been corrupted yet. In other words, while an archetypal street, like the *rue de la Huchette* in Paris for example, might have been, *in reality*, disneyfied from one end to the other with an avalanche of souvenir shops that sell t-shirts with Mickey Mouse holding possessively the Eiffel tower, your own personal mental simulation of an atmosphere of a street of love might not necessarily include the shops. In fact, as observed in the analyses of the forthcoming interviews, it most likely would be excluding them, along with the hoard of tourists, the smell of urine and the crown jewels of capitalism: the Danish-not-Danish American brand of ice cream (Häagen Dazs) that sits at the Western end of the street. This paradoxical dyad forms a very postmodern condition studied thoroughly by Eva Illouz in her analysis of the consuming of the utopia of love. (Illouz,1997)

The growing gap between these two worlds has generated a very modern affliction that psychiatrists refer to as the Paris Syndrome: a nervous breakdown that tourists experience when confronted with the realities of a place (most often observed in Paris) in comparison with the image they had of it. (Menick, 2012) (McQueen, 2017) Again, similarly to the common misreading of Emma Bovary’s tale, it would be easy to reduce the phenomenon to a delusional fantasy fed by medias. (Fagan, 2011) As if film, television or literature was independent entities that create worlds out of thin air, fully autonomous from the emotional lives of individuals. Although the cause of the syndrome is undoubtedly related to the media’s manipulation of the real, used by the ruling classes to serve capitalist interests, (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972) the ground of that distortion of reality — what it is rooted in — must have, in order to be any efficient, an emotional resonance that contains a story proper to itself. (Lyons, 2015) In the case of Paris, (partly) a story of love. It would be tempting to roll the eyes and dismiss this affective dimension as frivolous: as if the real was somehow superior to the dreamed, that the emotions contained in the projected version of the place were infantile, naive and meaningless. As though the corruption, the crime and the smell of urine of a city existed more than the moments of solidarity, magic and love experienced daily by its citizens. As most notoriously stated by the British movie director Richard Curtis, the person behind the chronically and cynically criticised film *Love, Actually*:

“If you make a film about a man kidnapping a woman and chaining her to a radiator for five years, something that has happened probably once in history – it’s called a searingly realistic analysis of society. If you make a film [...] which is about people falling in love, and there are about a million people falling in love in Britain today, it’s called a sentimental presentation of an unrealistic world.”

(Curtis cited in Bregman,2020)

Could this tendency — what psychologists call the *negativity bias* (Rozin and Royzman, 2001) — to recognise certain chosen chunks of reality as more real than certain others might have left out parts of our emotional selves up for grabs, prone to manipulation by the gears of capitalist interest? As observed in a Weberian fashion by the sociologist Colin Campbell in his *Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Consumerism*, romantic love (and its imaginary) has been occupying a dialectical role in its relationship with modernity. While it has been, on one side, a site of resistance of the conformism and individualism of the capitalist ethic, it





A simulated atmosphere of love can be seen as a metaphor of a world where we resist the alienating conditions of reality by projecting another version of it.

Google Street View. Avenue d'Eylau, Paris. 2020.  
Memories in Paris. 2021.

has also been, on the other, its product. <sup>(Campbell,2005)</sup> Even though it has been striving to subvert the rationalising forces by fuelling a seditious imaginative project directed at creating meaningful connections with others, it has also been shaped and maintained by a consumerist ethic that did all it could to make it comply and contribute to a profit-driven institutionalised enterprise. <sup>(Campbell,2005)</sup>

A paradoxical nature that we also find represented in the divided literature on love. On one side, authors that see it as a by-product of deeper social tensions, like Giddens, Luhmann, Baumann, Beck and Illouz and on the other, thinkers such as Hardt, Fromm, Alberoni, May, Irigaray, Badiou, hooks or Vaneigem that consider it as a creative and transformative drive, uniquely able to work along the nature of modernity to affect change. A relationship pointing to both sides of the same coin; a tension that can be found as far back as Weber's recognition of the reciprocal relationship between theologically directed emotions and the economic sector in his analysis of the *Protestant ethics and the spirit of Capitalism*. <sup>(Weber,1905 [2011])</sup>

However, as some have observed it, <sup>(Giddens,1993)(Han,2017)(Baumann,2003)(Illouz,2020)</sup> the balance between both of these forces has been — and continues to be — under threat. Having been gradually corrupted by the consumerist, rationalist and individualist forces of modernity, what is left of love in its romantic form is now laying bare under the last assaults of the capitalist ethic. <sup>(Illouz,2020)</sup> Led by modern cynicism — this widespread defence mechanism against the ambiguities of modernity <sup>(Livni, 2018)(Bregman,2020)</sup> — the efforts contributing to the current agony of romantic love have not yet fully reached the potent remnants of its imaginary. This world constructed over centuries, shaped by the scars and battlefields of a struggle that enmeshed it in a thick post-modern paradox <sup>(Illouz,1998)</sup>, but that is still providing an evolving map of the routes to kindle reality like oxygen on embers. As the feminist thinker Mona Chollet phrases it, it is no wonder that in this imaginative construction “both the world and humans are showing their best side to each other, since this is the ritual where they renew their mutual engagement” <sup>(Chollet,2006;My Translation)</sup>; a new realism where we resist the cowardness of cynicism and commit to the boldness of potential.

Instead of surrendering, as the sociologist Finn Bowring has suggested it <sup>(Bowring,2019)</sup>, could we be recovering this imaginary of love? Could we, as the critic Cristina Nehring has been defending it, *Reclaim Romance for the Twenty-first Century* as a feminist act, as a vindication of love? <sup>(Nehring,2009)</sup> Revitalise a spatial

project that bears in itself the daring sprouts of our enjoyment? Re-appropriate it from capitalist hands and use it to construct more inclusive, plural and rich environments? As a story that turns back the mirror on the Capital of Modernity (Harvey,2006), could we instead understand the historico-cultural inflation put on the atmosphere of the Capital of Love as a clue? Could its clichés elements like the terraces of cafés or the smell of croissant be indicators of potential rather than material used to denigrate and malign a certain perspective of the city? Could we use the emotion of love to inform us? Like the affective turn has acknowledged it for a while now, could we recognise that love, like all emotional experiences, is a form of cognition, that thinking and feeling is linked in an inextricable relationship. (Norman,2005) Could these cliché, tacky or cringy elements tell us more about the causes of our own cynicism, of our own insecurity, than about a certain form of delusion? Could the simulated urban atmosphere of love be pointing to a way to inhabit modernity at its fullest, revealing the deficiencies of reality by unfolding the world like an accordion (Chollet,2006) and furnish the space of its creases? In short, could it help us make better streets?

## BEYOND THE CLICHÉ

*“When we concentrate on an inner picture and when we are careful not to interrupt the natural flow of events, our unconscious will produce a series of images which make a complete story.”* (Jung, 1935[1997])

*“Love builds up.”* (Kierkegaard, 1847[2009])

After having traced some of the forces that have been shaping the atmosphere of love through history, we can now turn more acutely to its structure. By wearing the salient marks of some of the most important religious, social and political transformations of the past centuries, the spatial dimension of love, in its simulated form, has acquired a potent architecture, a spatiality reflective of love's aims and purposes. An imaginary that points, like a beacon, towards another possible world beyond the control of oppressive forces and into a universe that recognises the alterity, complexity and diversity of human life. Although it is, at first, the *elements* of its imaginary — such as lamp posts or narrow lanes — that comes to mind when visualising its urban atmosphere, it is the recurring *motifs* in between the descriptions of its spatiality that disclose its potency. Cobblestones, for example, one of the most persisting elements of characterisations of urban contexts of love, are not significant in themselves. It is the stories they tell that is meaningful. Narratives that are less about cobblestones per se and more about how their sensoriality is connecting us with an environment by embodying the themes of possibility, difference and delight. Themes with sub related dimensions — which we will be naming *motifs* — that are representing some of the mechanisms that are orchestrating the atmosphere of love: giving meanings

to its elements. In order to provide the bases for the identification of these motifs, interviews were conducted. While samples of these descriptions can be found in the speech bubbles of graphic avatars, the reader is encouraged to use his own visualisation of an urban atmosphere of love to reflect upon the motifs.

In a Jungian fashion, the respondents were asked to *actively imagine* (Jung, 1935[1997]) and describe, in the most detailed possible way, the image that prompts into their mind when trying to visualise a street that appears *to them and only them as a place where they could imagine themselves falling in love*. The participants were encouraged, when their initial spontaneous description would come to an end, to let the image evolve by mentally look at their feet, above their head, behind them and on their left and right to try to depict the clearest image possible. Since the current research is part of a larger design project that wants to make use of the collected images — as the material for the formulation of an alternative vision for a regeneration project in suburban Paris — the participants were, therefore, all selected within this area through snowball sampling. The people interviewed were of various sexual orientations<sup>heterosexual (13), heteroflexible (1), homosexual(4), bisexual(2)</sup>, gender identities<sup>male (10), female (10)</sup>, cultural backgrounds<sup>French, Vietnamese, Togolese, Martinique, Canadian, Polonese, English, Jewish, Ivorian, Chinese, Spanish, Lebanese</sup> and ages<sup>21 — 73</sup>.

The participants were also asked to position themselves on a ladder from 1 to 10 in accordance to where they situate themselves in relation to their self-perceived socioeconomic situation, 10 representing a perception of oneself as very privileged. The answers varied from 2 to 9. (Full sociodemographic profiles in appendix) While efforts were put to gather a group as diverse as possible, the participants assembled are far from being representative of the infinite plurality of human realities. They should instead be considered as an informative sample that draws *a few* portraits of *a few* representations of *a few* spatial dimensions of love. While each description had their unicities, key overarching concepts that responded to the nature of love kept reoccurring from one description to the other. We will be giving a summary of each one of these in the form of eleven vignettes as an interpretation of what could an architecture of an atmosphere of love be communicating and representing. These motifs are not to be taken as truths, or attempts at describing any form of objective reality (unlike Christopher Alexander's *Pattern Language* (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein, 1977) for example) but rather as a series of interpretations or metaphors to understand the forces at play in the formulation of an atmosphere of love. Presented from a disengaged point of view to avoid repetition, the reader is invited to consider the presence of the phrase “the participants appeared to agree that...” at the beginning of every sentence.

Before any answer, two knee-jerk responses were verbalised by each one of the twenty respondents. Two conditions aforementioned that represent the complex dilemmas of post-modern love and the intense necessity of modern beings to assert their autonomy. First, the participants all communicated the truism that any place can represent a space of love as long as one is with the right person and in the right mood. And secondly, they all stressed their awareness of an archetypal representation of a street of love and its manipulation by either heteronormative, capitalist, racist or sexist forces. Only when encouraged to overcome these barriers and to try to simulate mentally a street that *to them and only them would feel like a street that expresses an atmosphere of love*, only then were the respondents able to flow into their descriptions. Once comforted in their craving for the recognition of the unicity of their person and once assured that the conversation would be a safe space from any judgement on the sentimentality or commonplaceness of their answer, the participants were able to open up and navigate their imagination freely, unpolluted (partly) from their defence mechanisms. Instead of fighting the clichés, they were now able to make use of them; like architects considering an architectural typology, adapting it and using it as a valuable cultural tool. Once reclaimed from the hands of oppressive forces (like heteronormativity or patriarchy for example), they were able to interpret personally those images, judge by themselves of their representativity of their own emotional selves <sup>(Geary,2012)</sup> and acknowledge their role as part of the metaphors they live by. <sup>(Lakoff & Johnson, 2017)</sup>

Additionally, three observations from the interviews have been reflecting the potential of love as a positive trigger to generate an alternative language for architectural production. (1) The descriptions were all displaying a surprising amount of sensory details. Never referring to preconceived stylistic sets, the participants used their senses to depict situations, textures, smells, sounds, moments, encounters and their emotional connection with them. (2) The worlds they described all reflected places that the participants valued, “outside of reality”, “where the rush, pressure and judgement of everyday life would be suspended”. In many depictions, the street was connected to another road with negative references to disturbances of the everyday such as transportation, noise or a certain type of architecture that they would describe with words such as “bland”, “ugly”, “tall” or “grey”. The street of love they described appeared to them, through their descriptions, as a world they would supremely value, a place where they could “be truly themselves”, a place that would feel to them like

their “little corner of the world”. A place outside of commerce, with no chains or any explicit references to commerce. (3) Most importantly, even if all descriptions had their idiosyncrasies, they all shared many similarities. Elements and patterns kept reoccurring between descriptions, which allowed for the formulation of rich and comprehensive motifs.

Observant readers will recognise the numerous similarities between what the spatiality of love appears to be suggesting and many seminal texts of urban and architectural theory. (See table p.78) While only one participant declared working in the field, they have ingeniously been able to assemble a mosaic of diverse approaches to spatial design and have successfully been able to condense them in coherent images. With a single mental picture, triggered by a single question about a single emotion, the participants have created, in a matter of minutes, entire worlds analogous to each other that condensed more than a hundred years of research on urban design and architecture. As a series of interconnected individual manifestos, each image produced contained within itself a set of information to reimagine their living conditions. Not only these images were developed in accordance with an uncountable amount of theorists and practitioners — the ones identified in the table being only the obvious ones — but also, and most importantly, they represented a place that the respondents valued. Regardless of their diverse backgrounds or socioeconomic situation, the participants depicted a world offset from *their* reality that materialised a blueprint of *their* alternative for a new, rich and positive experience of *their* world. They allowed themselves to bypass the rational and practical imperatives of the everyday and used an emotional fictional projection as a way to unlock a new vocabulary: a world that responded to the nature of love. A glimpse at a promising reality <sup>(May,2019)</sup> outside of alienation, a fundamental experience of difference <sup>(Badiou,2009)</sup> manifested in a delightful expression of the imaginary. A growing *language* with its own evolving grammar, conjugating the *themes* of possibility, difference and delight through a developing lexicon of *motifs* that displaces the necessities of everyday life and replace them with a flow of enchanting possibilities. It is to these recurring motifs that we now turn to expose *an* interpretation of *an* architecture of *an* urban atmosphere of love.

C-2

# A LEXICON OF MOTIFS



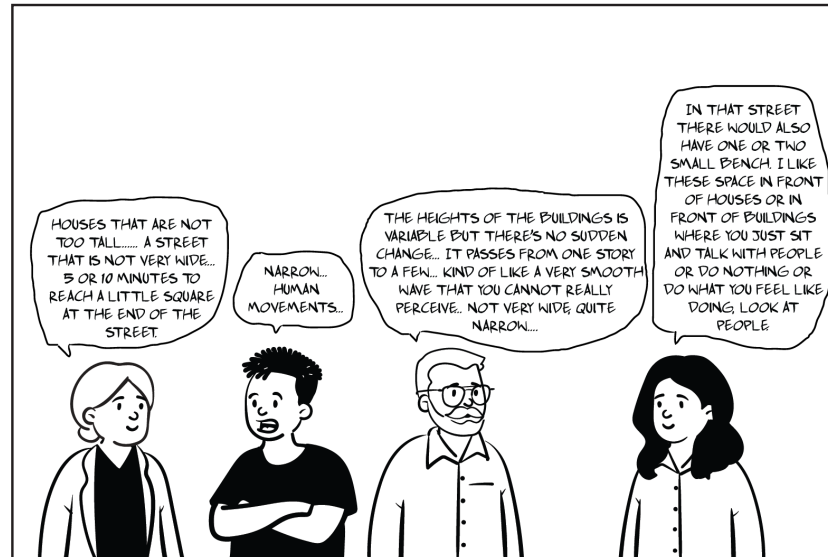
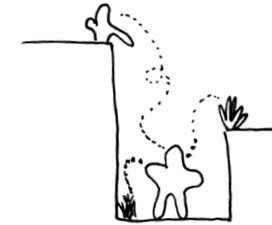
# ACCESS



*First and foremost, and a prerequisite for any other motifs, no space can be a place of love without the access and the safety for all to be and love publicly. From an economic perspective or a civil rights point of view, an urban atmosphere of love is a place where you experience no form of discrimination or harassment on any grounds whatsoever. A place where you can be — or explore — yourself without fear.*

POSSIBILITY

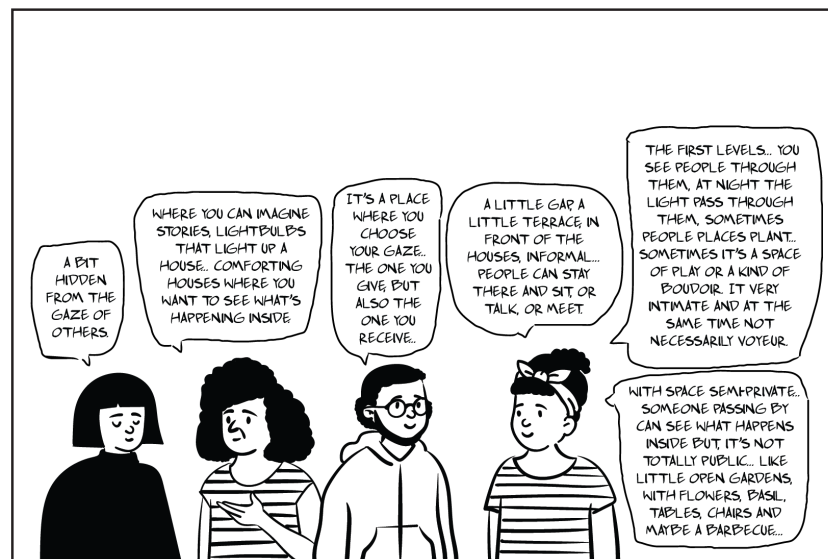
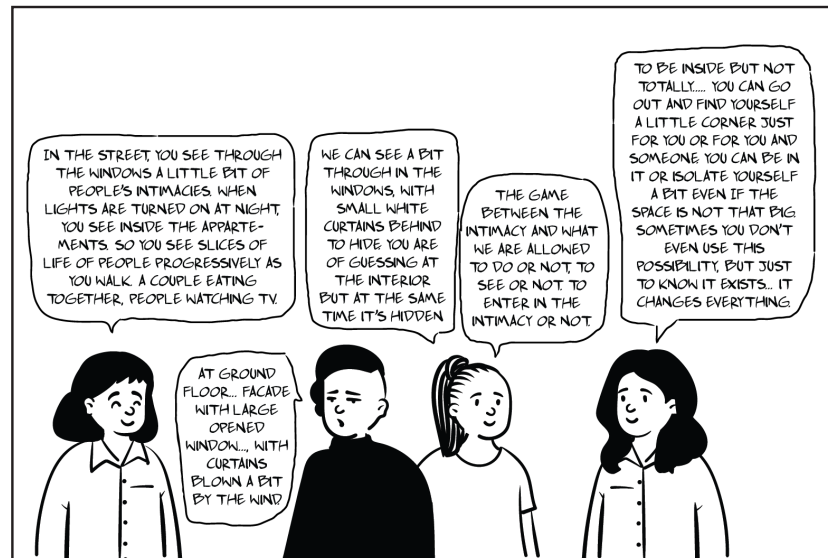
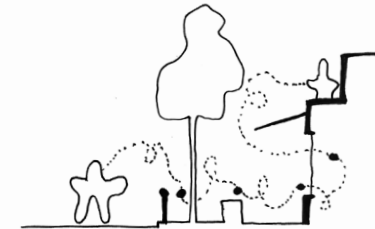
# CONNECTIVITY



An urban context of love is somewhere that affords you to connect and interact with your surroundings. A place that integrates social relations in the immediacies of their context, producing the points of contact and the spontaneity to enable you to relate directly with the environment and other living beings: where you feel *embedded*. (Giddens,1990) Where dimensions and distances are allowing your senses and body to be effective without the necessity of intermediary mechanisms. A place where you can reach much of what you need to reach by foot. Where it is possible for you to talk with someone across the street, see someone at their balcony, smell flowers on a doorstep, touch with your eyes and hands the roughness of a wall or hear various sounds, all without the use of a phone, an intercom or binoculars. It is a place where intermediary locations — not your home or your workplace — allow you to connect outside of the supervision of the everyday.

POSSIBILITY

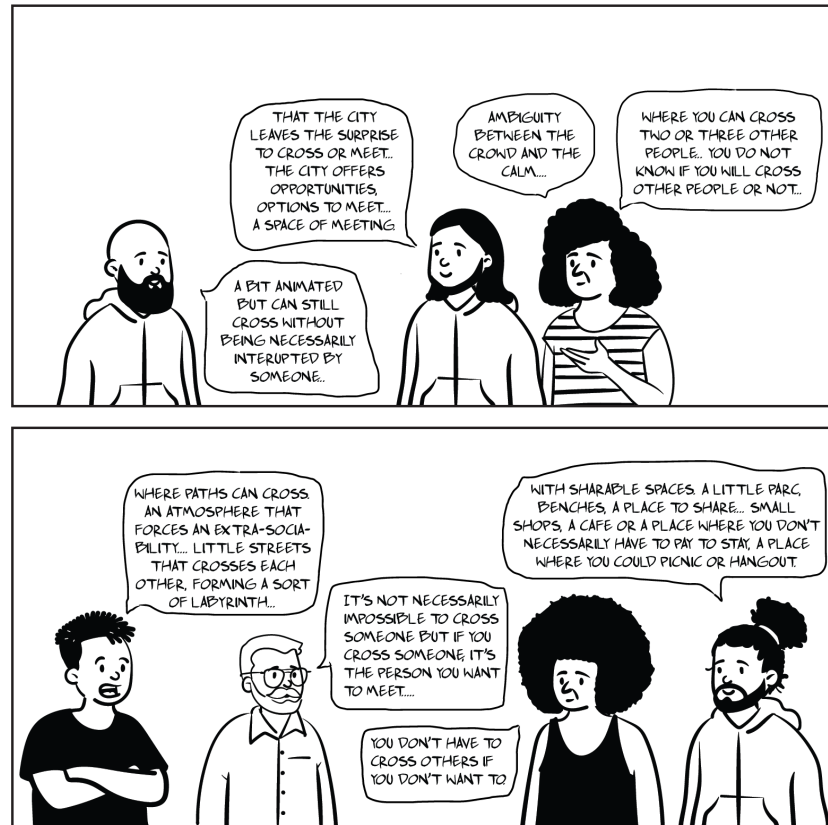
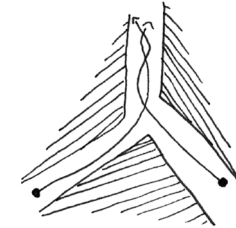
# GRADIENCE



*An urban atmosphere of love celebrates the multitude of options and in-betweens that can exist between the full exposure of public life and the complete seclusion of privateness. It fragments the gradient by loosening the tension that exists between both realms and blurs the boundaries by populating them with a diversity of moments. A plinth, a window sill, a bollard, a lamp post, a bench, an awning, a terrace, a corner, a plant, a curb, a tree, a balcony, anything can serve to gradate the varying degrees of possible privacies and create diversified spaces for distinct variations on potential intimate situations. It is a place with complex edges, where each can freely choose the level at which they want to be exposed and where you can consequently glimpse at different moments of different privacies in which you can project yourself. A person sitting at their window reading a book, someone watching a film in a living room, two people kissing at the back of a terrace: peeks at other realities that might carry for you a sense of home.*

POSSIBILITY

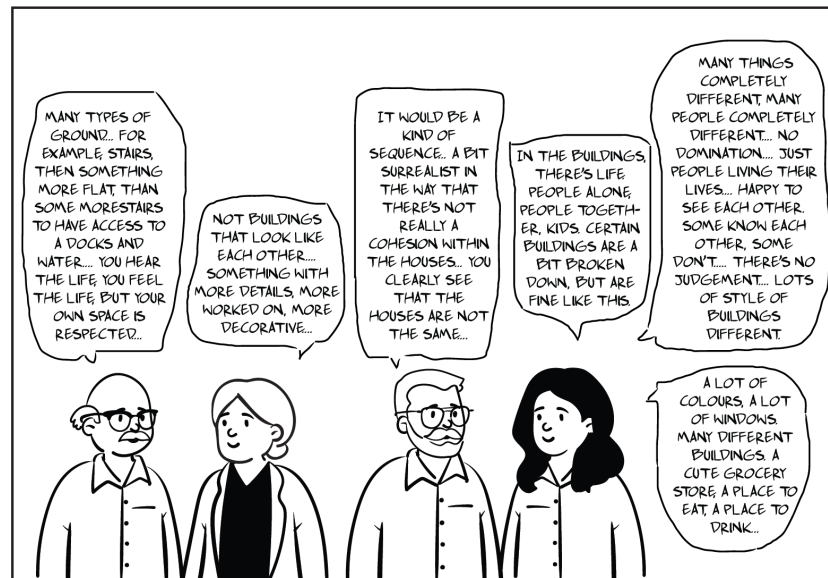
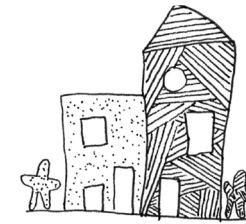
# INTERSECTABILITY



*The spatiality of love stresses the possibility of positive fortuitous encounters: when your path can intersect serendipitously with the one of others you wish to meet. A place where streets criss-cross each other and where confluent spaces of various uses multiply the possibilities for enchanting chance meetings to happen. The gradient edges of streets of love, affording for many possibilities of exposure, participate in this interplay for the production of desired encounters and the avoidance of unwelcomed ones.*

POSSIBILITY

# PETITS RÉCITS

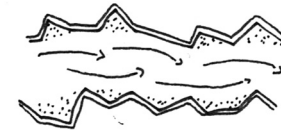


*An urban atmosphere of love celebrates and confronts you with the multiplicity, diversity and granularity of human realities. It communicates the evidence that outside of "You" exist other "I"s that are perceived as unique to themselves as you are unique to yourself. It decentres your sense of self, loosens your impression of omnipotence and presents a world where the uncertainty, the ambiguity and the unpredictability of the world appear to you as a delightful collage. Where the world is a performance to watch and not a problem to solve. A place where buildings are visibly numerous, of different styles, materials, ages, colours, heights and texture. An eclecticism held together by a luscious tension. A diversity of uses creating a tapestry of different realities and the expression of the plurality of individualities manifested in the many instances that are showing the evidence of the human hand. Clothes hanging on a balcony, a door sculpted with care, stones on the floor placed one by one, assorted pots of plants in front of a house, writings on a wall, all indications of the alterity, uniqueness and care of others. No grand story but a mosaic of interconnected little narratives: a place of many moments.*

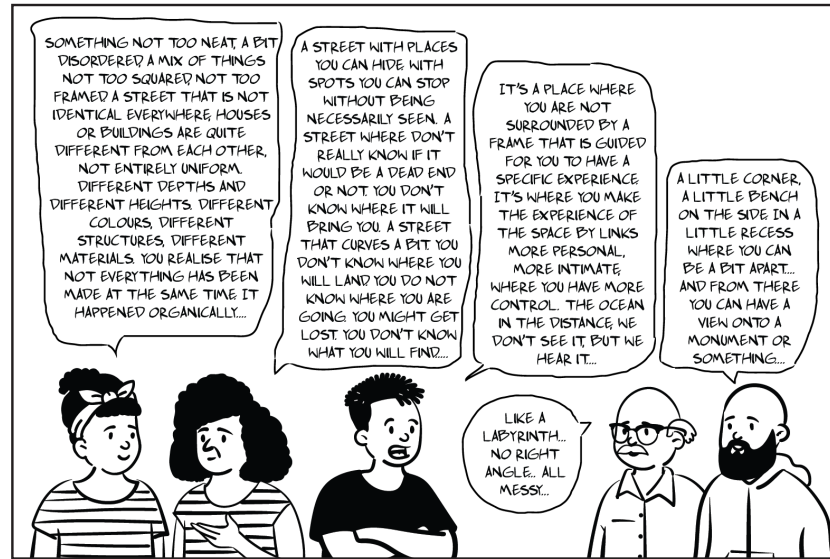
DIFFERENCE



# ATECTONICS



*The contemporary urban atmosphere of love praises atectonic forms over tectonic ones.* This dichotomy put forward by the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (Wölfflin, 1932), described the differentiation between works of art to portray compositions that are either open or closed, unpredictable or predictable, indeterminate or determinate, pointing beyond themselves or self-contained, irregular or regular, free or controlled. In its celebration of intricacy, mystery and idiosyncrasies, the urban spatiality of love situates itself on the left side of these dualities as an exemplary model of atectonic qualities. The street of love kinks or curves to always assume that reality extends beyond the visible. Like a painting where the edges are cutting the scene to leave the imagination continue the story beyond the canvas, the atmosphere of love opens the narrative of the city to extend reality beyond what is seen. Protruding forms, nooks, corners, irregularities, sudden changes, intricate alleyways, the street of love emphasises the openness and difference of reality by stimulating the eye with unfinished pictures, with the “*dignity of the unknown*” (Novalis, 1798 [1997]). Like for a machine that runs on the heat it produces, this atectonic character of the urban atmosphere of love adds the gears to reality which generate the friction and resistance that give human life its meaning. An atmosphere that suggests an experience of the city that challenges illusory impressions of control and cravings for order.



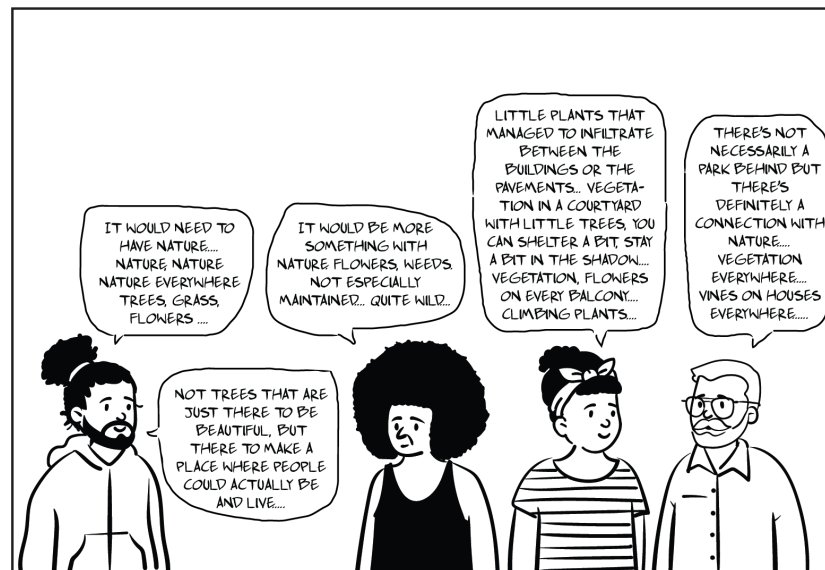
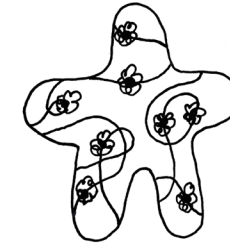
# LIMINALITY



*The world of love is a world at the limits of control* (Sendra and Sennett, 2020), *a place of in-betweens that celebrates the transient and the transitional. Where the normal is lifted and the oppressive is transgressed to make room for the difference of a novel world to be.* A place that embodies the seditious character of love and its capacity to construct a space of resistance in the face of the dehumanising and alienating conditions of reality. Located outside of the influence of commerce, away from the routine of the ordinary and far from the judgement, obligations and stress of everyday life, the atmosphere of love constructs a world at the margins of control where one can explore who one wants to be. It populates its imaginary with thresholds of all flavours, between *what was* and *what could be*. Staircases, bridges, balconies, passages, doorways, overhangs, train stations, anything symbolising the transitional can find its way into a spatiality of love. Anywhere where the authority of the ordinary can be suspended. Gardens, parks, beaches, alleyways, those “*semi-concealed spaces of the amorous imagination*” (Boym, 2010) where are pushed the boundaries of the expected and the limits of surveillance. The imaginary of love stresses the intermediate, the times of transfer from one state to another. It places a particular emphasis on dusk and dawn, on the transitional seasons of autumn and spring: moments of movement, where the passage of time is visible in space in one chronotopic (Bakhtin, 2000) experience of the world. Occasions that confront you with a circular experience of time, outside of linearity, where renewal and potential merge to present possibilities all over again.

## DIFFERENCE

# WOVEN NATURE

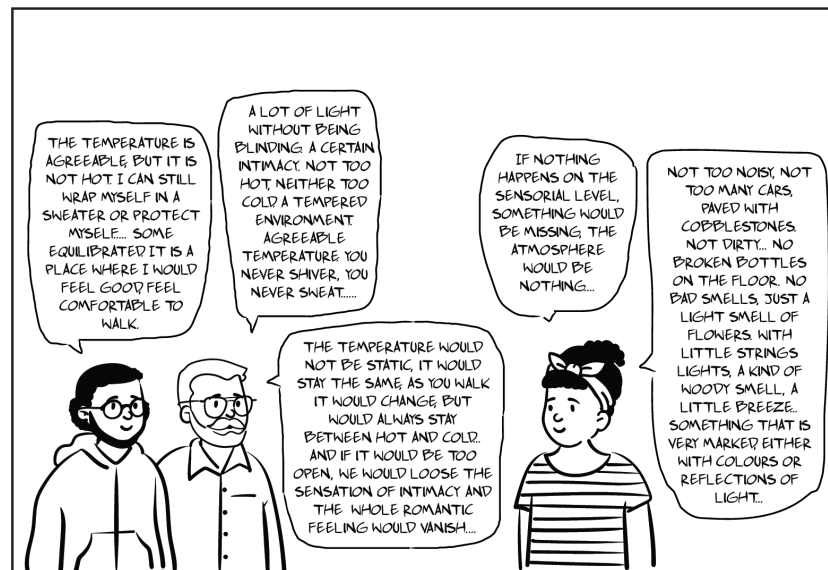
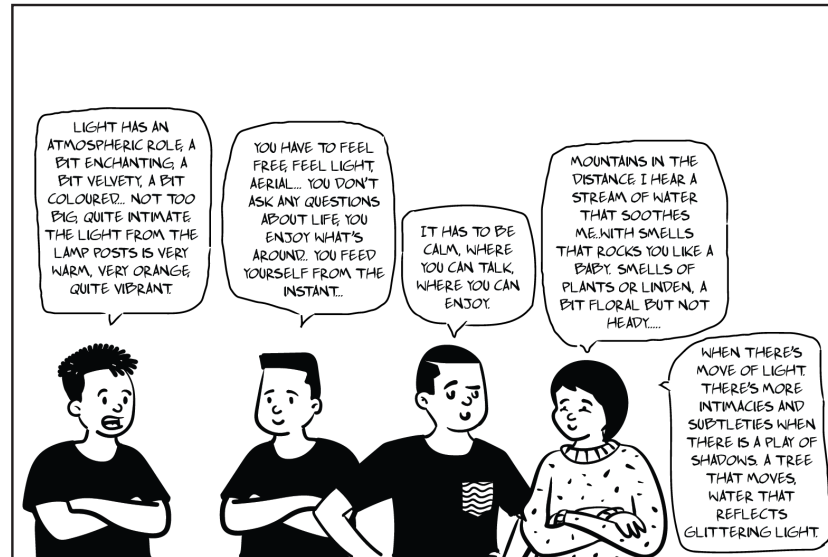


*The atmosphere of love is where the artificial and the natural intertwine in a lush balance. Where time, weather, light, plants, trees, flowers and animals renew their relationship with the anthropogenic. Where nature embraces, wraps, veils, sheathes, fondles or crawls into the man-made and resumes its timeless affair with humanity in an enchanting and magical fashion. By restating the humble position of humankind in the natural, the urban atmosphere of love presents the world anew, in both a recovered and a rediscovered state.* [\(Paz,1993\)\(May,2019\)](#)  
A lost Eden weaved into the real.

DELIGHT



# ENVIRONMENTAL BLISS



*The urban world of love is a world that caresses the senses. A place where the climatic and sensorial conditions are at their most delightful expression. Not too hot, not too cold, not too windy, not too loud, no glaring light or undesired rainfall, everything is composed in one agreeable and bewitching atmosphere. A place where no direct threats to life can be perceived, either in the form of machines, individuals or natural phenomena. Rather, the senses are triggered positively with subtle variations of stimuli: the moving shades of tree leaves on the ground, the piercing light through their branches, the delicate smell of rosemary in a planter, the distant sound of a square you are walking towards to, the massage of a textured pavement under your feet, all orchestrated in one enchanting sensuous experience. The width and height of the surroundings creates a comforting envelope, a sense of enclosure that recentres the intimacy on the moment. At times, the grandeur of nature or the majesty of landmarks can colour the atmosphere of love and adorn it with the dignity of that sentiment we get when standing on the safe side of danger.*

DELIGHT

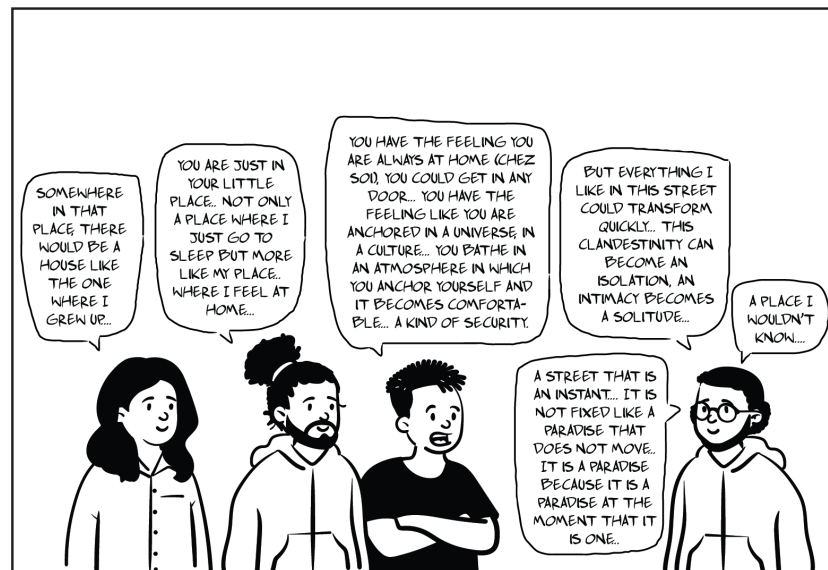
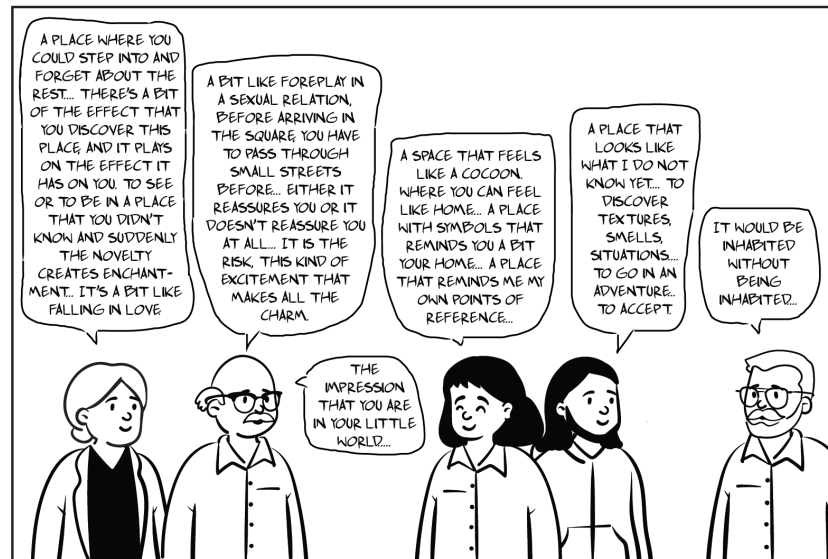
# MATTER TO TALK ABOUT



*The urban atmosphere of love is furnished with elements and situations that carry stories. Time, effort and experiences populate the streets of love with artefacts that bear within themselves the anecdotes, narratives or biographies of other times or events. A statue, a door, a rock, a window, a corner, a tree, a laundromat, a fountain, anything can get charged with tales. A first kiss on a bench loads a bench forever. It mythologises its location, the air around it, the material it is made out of and transforms them into a story, it solidifies what is air. A whole country, a city, a neighbourhood or a single balcony can become enchanted with its association with personal or collective fictions. The details and adornments of buildings, of urban furnitures or even sewer drains, anything that does not evoke indifference to a perceiver carries a fictional potential. The motives of a person that draws with chalk on a sidewalk, who decides to line garden gnomes on its window sill, who sculpts figures in stone on the portal of a building, who locks a lock on a chain-link fence, any narrative intention into space can find its way into a simulation of an atmosphere of love. If *“love is a fiction willed into reality through mutual belief”* (Cutler, 2021), its atmosphere must be populated by the mutual belief in the reality of fictions.*



# INVERTED UNCANNY



An atmosphere of love is where you feel at home, not a home, or as French speakers would say it “*chez soi, pas chez soi*”. (Literally translated as “At self, not at self”). It is when what is totally different, foreign and novel appears somehow to feel familiar, refreshing and inspiring. A reversed process to the one uncovered by Freud in the formulation of the frightening feeling of the uncanny: when what is homely (*heimlich*) is simultaneously revealed as unhomely (*unheimlich*).<sup>(Freud, 1919)</sup> Oppositely, love presents, *at the same time*, the unfamiliar in a familiar form, as if you’ve known it forever<sup>(Presley, 1962)</sup> even if you’ve never seen it before. Like a wave about to break, the atmosphere of love dwells on that edge between the known familiarity of open sea and the distressing unfamiliarity of whitewater. Like a surfer, it constantly readjusts itself to represent a world that stays faithful to that sweet spot, playing and growing in that thin and sensitive zone between the ordinary and the unsettling, between the banal and the strange, between the known and the unknown, between the isolating anonymity and the awkward chance encounters. It composes an image that brings you at the verge of your own personal capacity to cope with the unpredictable and the unfamiliar, and presents it into its most delightful form, as an alternative to doubt and boredom. Love is the radiant glow that enlightens that edge before it tips. Only a slight variation to the image can transform radically a street of love. (See visual case study p.80-86) Changing the tone of the light from a warm yellow to a bright blue in a narrow alley or adding a shadowy figure in the distance can change a space of love into a place of fear in a heartbeat. Similarly, knocking on a brick wall to realise it is made of cardboard or glimpsing at the golden arches of a fast food restaurant can make it tacky in no time. Rather than being an actual attainable place, a simulated atmosphere of love is a direction. A continuously shifting arrow that takes into consideration your experiences of a sense of home in the world and materialises your best guess for a delightful but also safe and engaging experience of the city.

## THEMES

## MOTIFS

## EXAMPLES OF REPRESENTATIVE ELEMENTS

## CORRESPONDANCE IN SEMINAL TEXT OF ARCHITECTURAL OR URBAN DESIGN THEORY

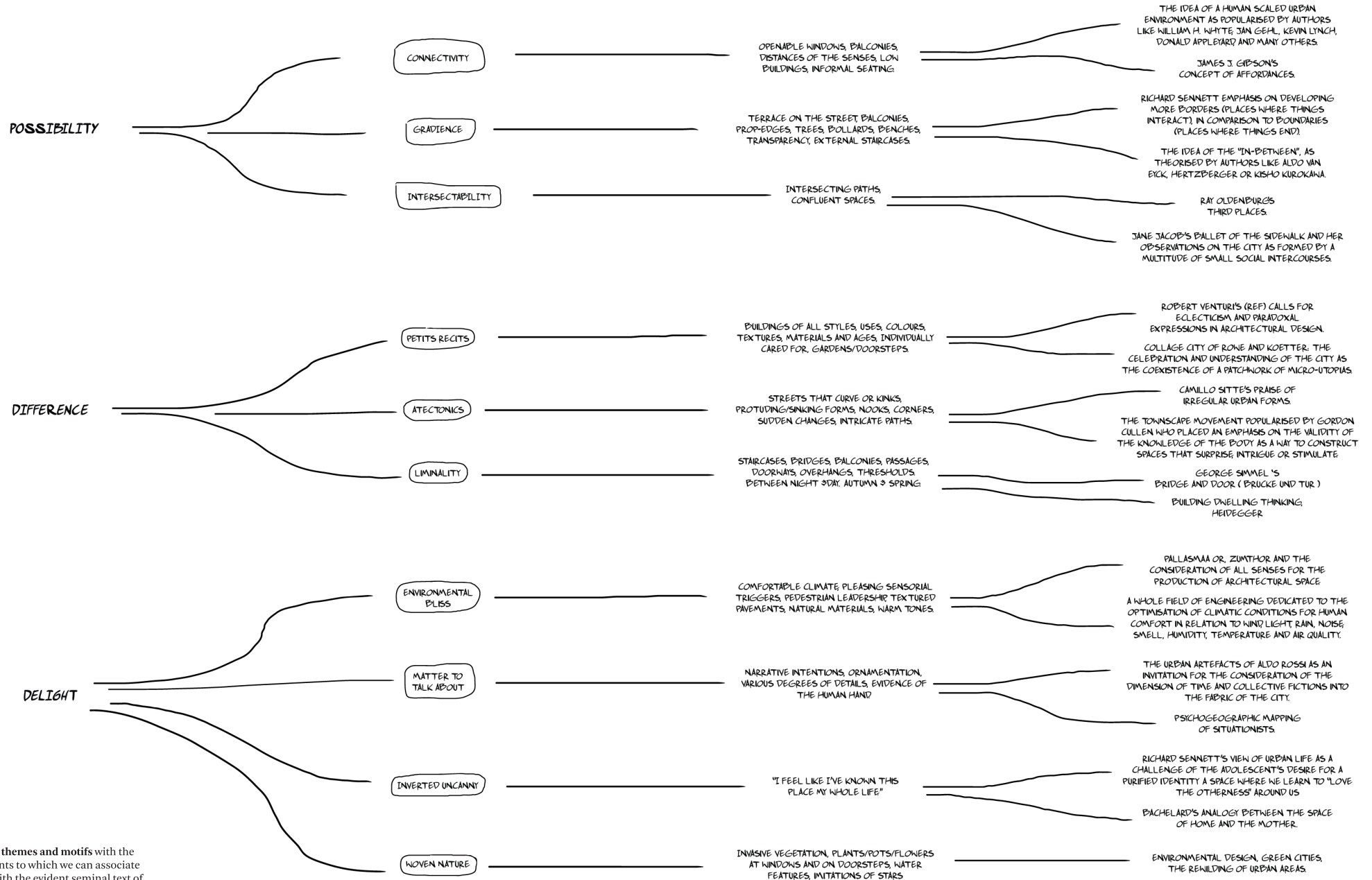
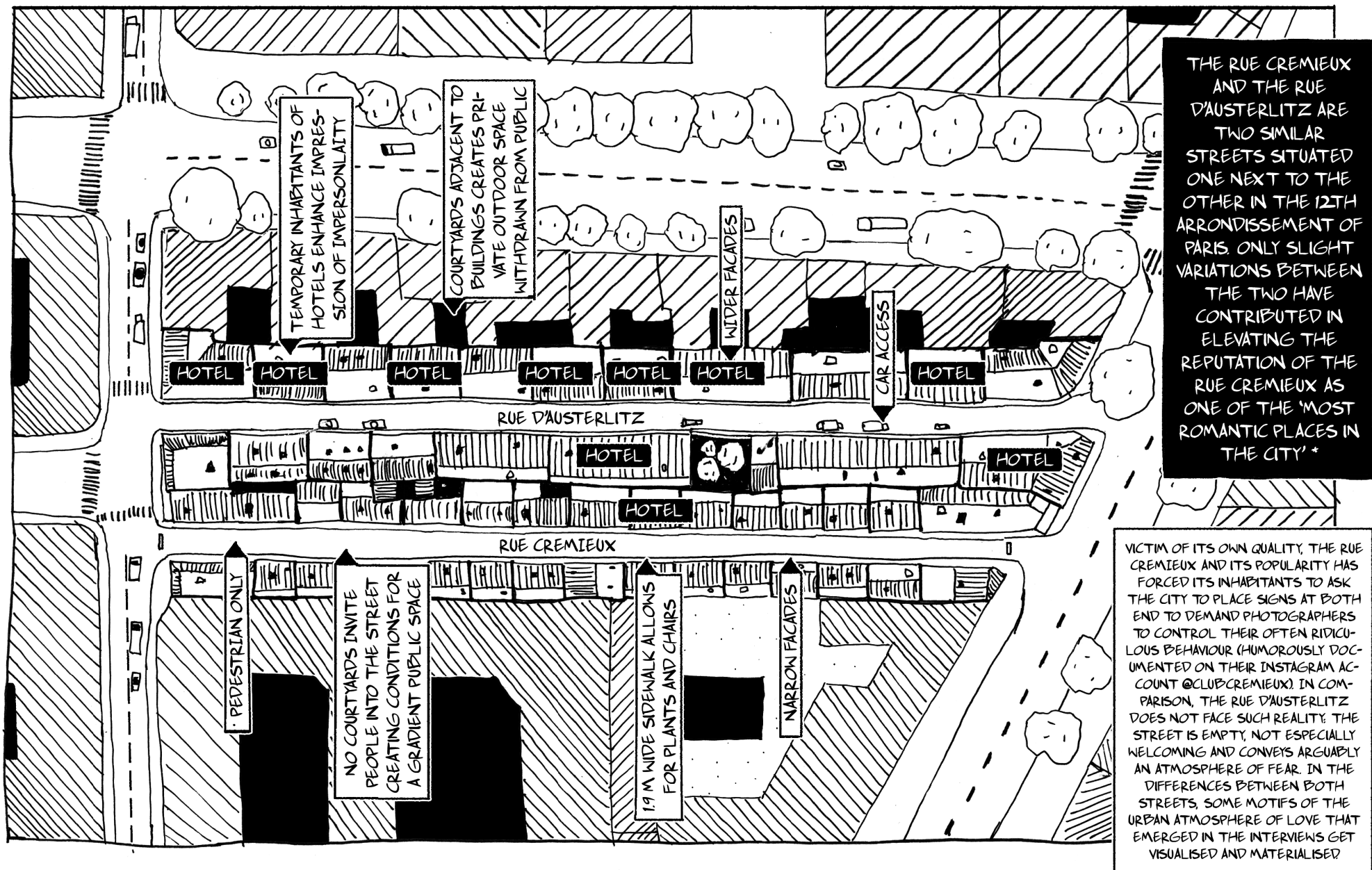


Diagram of the themes and motifs with the physical elements to which we can associate them, paired with the evident seminal text of architectural and urban design theory that correspond to their nature.

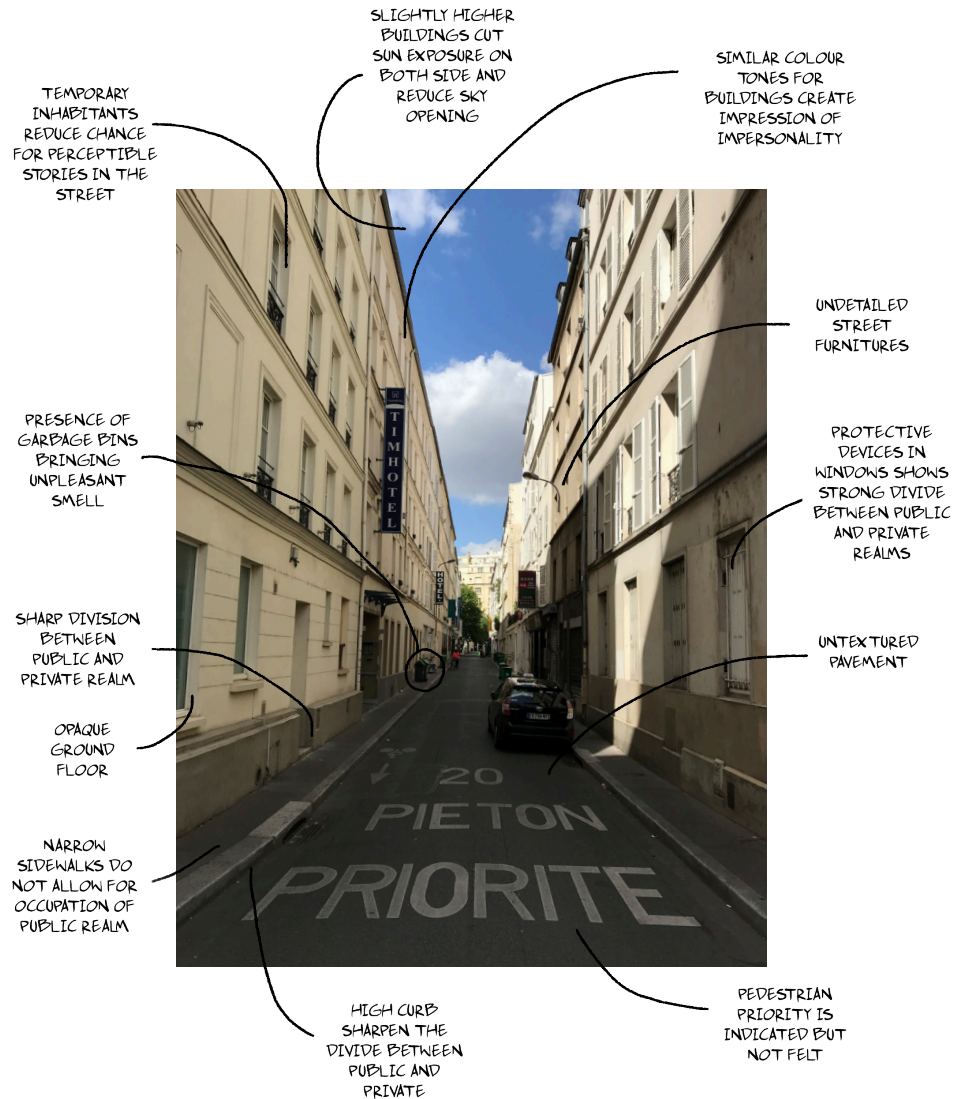




C-3

## VISUAL CASE STUDY: RUE CRÉMIEUX & RUE D'AUSTERLITZ

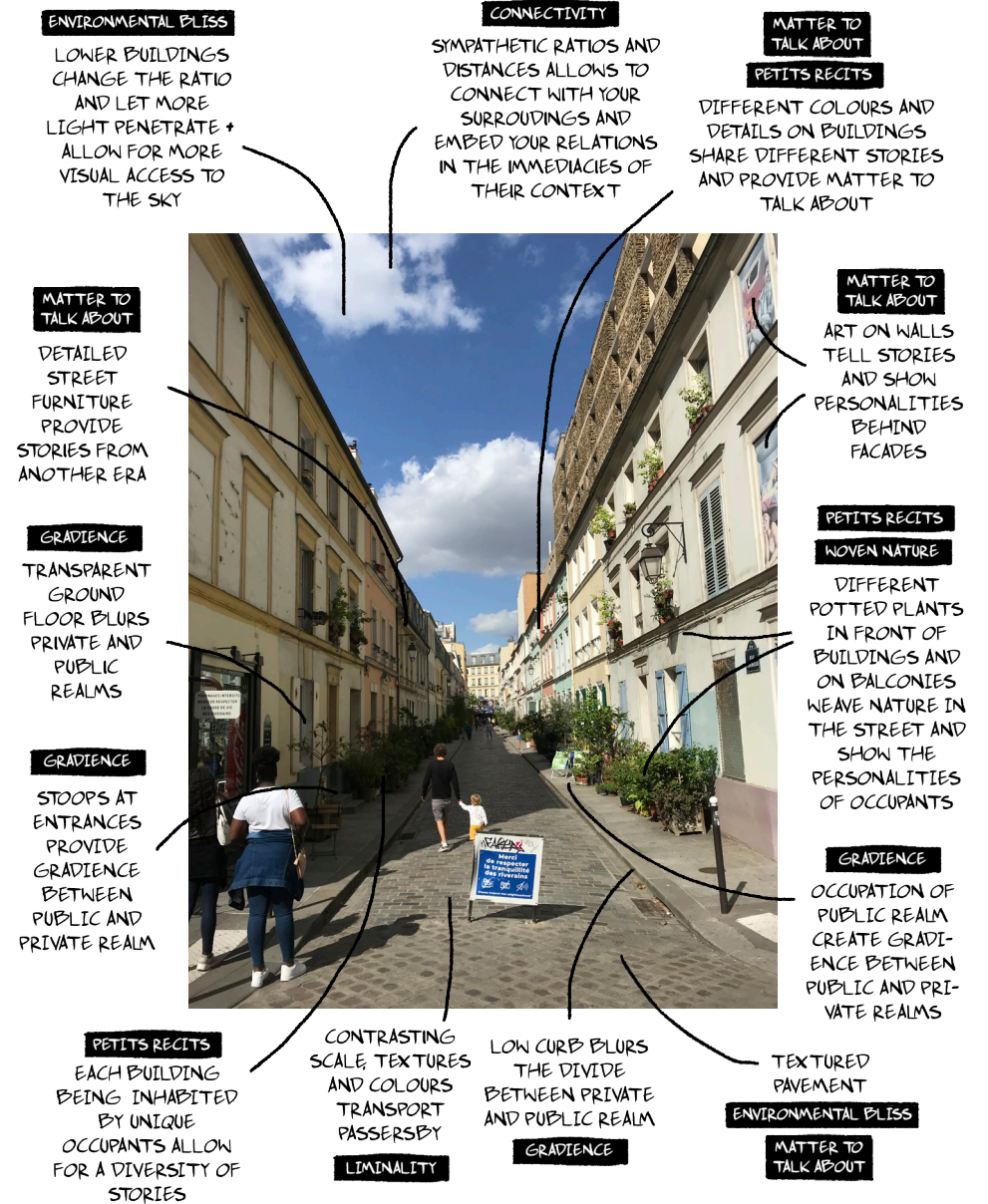
\* (THE ULTIMATE PARIS BUCKET LIST, 2020)



Rue d'Austerlitz

The impersonality, opacity and darkness of the rue d'Austerlitz contrast greatly with its neighbouring street. While it has a similar width and comparable facades, its atmosphere is completely different.

Rue d'Austerlitz, 2020. Louis Lupien.



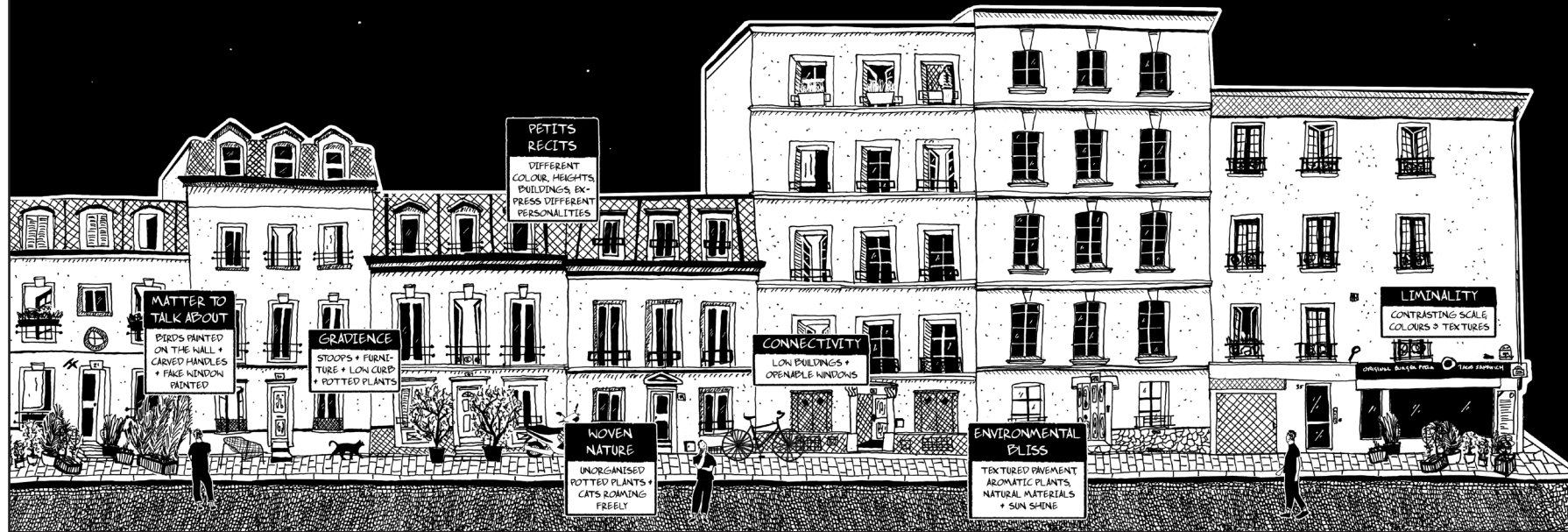
Rue Crémieux

By surpassing the cliché aesthetic and overwhelming popularity of the street, many motifs of the urban atmosphere of love — as observed in the interviews — find themselves materialised in the physical elements of the rue Crémieux.

Rue Crémieux, 2020. Louis Lupien.

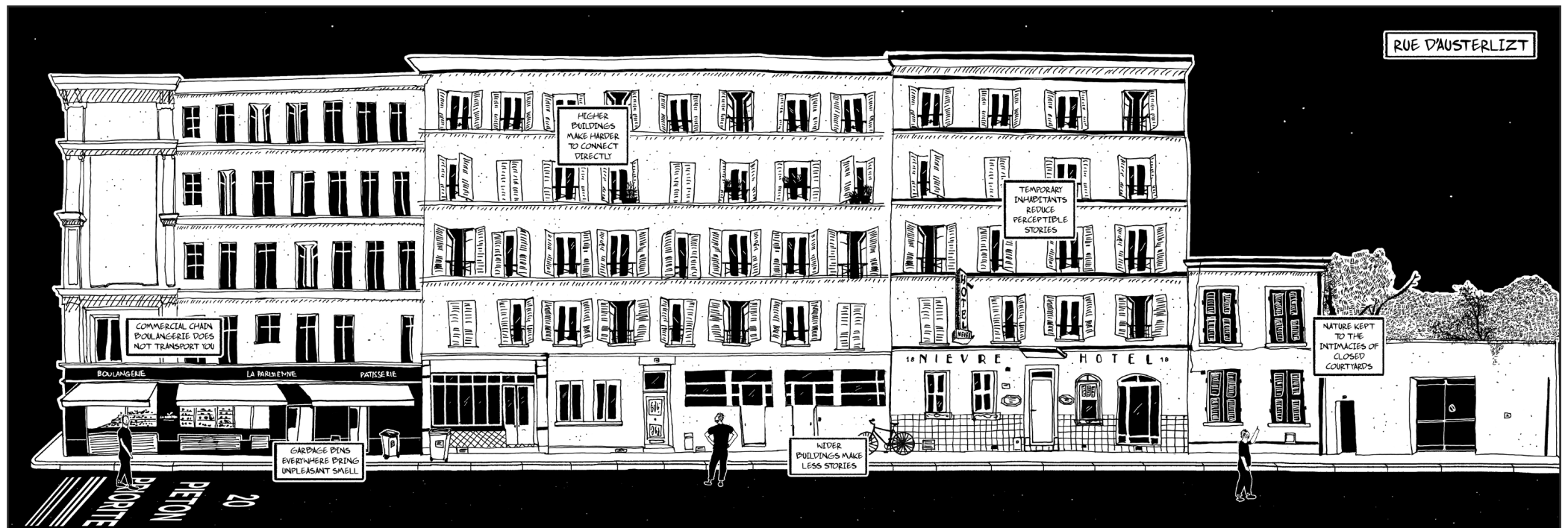


## RUE CREMIEUX

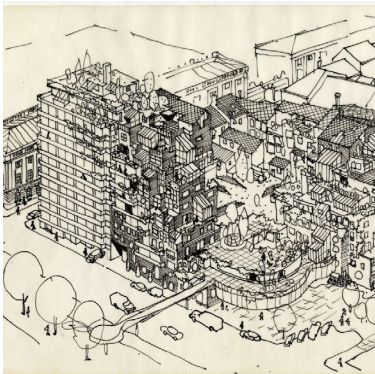


DESPITE ITS REPUTATION, THE RUE CREMIEUX IS IN REALITY A PLACE THAT MOST WOULD NOT NECESSARILY DESCRIBE IT AS A SPACE OF LOVE. THE FEELING OF INTIMACY, DISCOVERY AND CLANDESTINITY BEING HARD TO EXPERIENCE BETWEEN HOARDS OF INSTAGRAMMERS AND VIDEOCLIP PRODUCTIONS. HOWEVER (IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CULTURAL RESONANCE THAT ITS POPULARITY IS THE DEMONSTRATION OF), THE PHYSICALITY OF THE STREET TELLS A STORY CONCORDANT WITH THE MOTIFS OF THE ATMOSPHERE INTERPRETED IN INTERVIEWS.

## RUE D'AUSTERLITZ



## CONCLUSION: S'APPRIVOISER



The motifs of the atmosphere of love can find themselves represented in all sorts of context outside of the archetypes. By going beyond the cliché, it is possible to recognise and make use of the emotion and its atmospheric qualities.

Les Étoiles, Jean Renaudie. Paris. 1972

Cohabita, Atelier Lucien Kroll. Paris. 1976.

Network of alleys, Peter Barber Architects. Plaistow. 2020.

*“When the image is new, the world is new.”* (Bachelard, 1971)

*“All real living is meeting.”* (Buber, 1937)

The world can be many things, it can be many futures. And all those futures are out there, up for grabs. In this uncharted territory, our imagination roams free, exploring options for what could be. In its search, it illuminates certain areas of this spectrum and shapes the visible extent of the panorama of our possibilities. When we project an emotion into space — when we visualise the world it makes and how we feel about it — we widen this panorama. We make visible more futures. The spectrum of our emotional selves acts as a map that charts those potential worlds: each corner of it telling a different story. And the more stories we know, the more futures we see. The more granular, detailed and vivid the map is, the more information we have in the present to construct the world we want to be in. And in one treasured corner of this map is a story we’ve been telling each other for a while now. A story at *“the centre of our emotional life, both imaginary and real, for a thousand years”* (Paz, 1993): a story of love.

We have seen that love, like all emotions, tells its narrative spatially in the form of atmospheres which we can simulate. We project a fictional expression of the emotion into space by generating, in our minds, an imagery that concords with our affective experience of it. Influenced by our personal experiences, this world gets formed in accordance or in defiance to certain patterns of the social environments we have evolved in: our cultures. We have seen that within this fuzzy hodgepodge of cultures that we call Western, the notion of love and its



spatiality has developed along a series of social changes that defined how we conceive it and the role it occupies socially. By looking at contemporary analyses of the ground of love <sup>(May, 2019)</sup> (what it seeks), we've highlighted two main recurring themes that appeared as particularly relevant for the field of spatial practices. Characterised as a *glimpse* at a world of promising potentialities in the face of alienation and as a *potential space* <sup>(Winnicott, 1971)</sup> where one makes the fundamental experience of alterity, we've understood that what we conceptualise as love in the West occupies in our psyche a potent place for the positive exploration of possible spatial worlds. We've then followed three different histories that have left the most salient marks on the contemporary structure of the atmosphere of love in order to understand the forces involved in its formation. We've looked at the transfer of love from its God-directed form to its human-directed expression to see how this shift has brought about a novel aesthetic category, the Picturesque, that has set the basis for what would become the contemporary urban spatiality of love. We've then turned to women to see how their control of heterotopias and their engagement in spaces at the limits of control have been elemental in the formulation of the atmosphere of love as a space of liberation from the alienating conditions of reality. Finally, we have noticed that the world of love, in its celebration of subversion, has been shaped through history by its absorption of spatial symbols of political resistance. These three historical observations have led us to the present in an attempt to understand the constitution of the emotion's urban atmosphere. Through the interviews of twenty different participants of various backgrounds, we have recognised eleven recurring motifs that constructed an interpretation of a contemporary spatial dimension of love. We have seen that regardless of the social history of the participants, their descriptions — being cohesive with one another, highly detailed and representative of a place that the respondents highly valued — suggested the potential consideration of the notion love as an effective unlocker of alternative languages for the formulation of prospective urban environments: contexts that speak for a sensible re-enchantment of the world, a restructuring of social hierarchies and a re-embedding of social relations in the immediacies of their context. But why is love so able?

French speakers have this verb they use when they talk about the process of loving that does not exactly exist in other languages. Not coincidentally, this word emerged, in its current meaning, in the same place and time as the advent of the Western conception of romantic love. In the evolution of its signification,

the power and history of love is revealed. It is in the South of France, in the 11th century, that the verb *apprivoiser* acquires the signification of its current reflexive form *s'apprivoiser*. <sup>(Etymologie de Apprivoiser, n.d.)</sup> Coming from the latin 'privo', *(1) to make one's own, to deprive someone of something (2) to free, to be delivered from something,* <sup>(Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, A Latin Dictionary, privo, 2021)</sup> it gets generally translated — the Little Prince being the evident example — in a degrading and erroneous fashion: to tame, to master, to subdue, to control... However, by merging and cancelling both of its contradictory etymological meanings, the pronominal form of the verb, *s'apprivoiser* gives birth to a completely different signification. One that celebrates the paradoxical nature of love by implying a novel and revolutionary dimension: mutuality. For the reflexive form of the verb to make any sense, what *I m'apprivoise à* must be a subject, a self-existent entity to which I need to perpetually adapt myself to. At that moment, *s'apprivoiser* starts to signify something closer to '*to familiarise oneself*', since one recognises now that the subject (a living being, a place, an object or an abstraction) will never be one's own, it will always exist outside the Self as a fundamentally unpredictable and uncontrollable universe.

Love, we argue, is the process by which the world and humans *s'apprivoisent*. Without the *s'* before it, its meaning can get closer to the one of English, where humans *apprivoisent* (tame) the world. They make it private for them, appropriate it, deprive the world of its freedom. They attempt to make it less wild, less farouche. They want it for themselves, now, compliant to the way they thought the world was and should be. Dominated, disappointed and reduced to an object, the world makes itself small, it fades away. Humans become indifferent to it, they do not see it anymore. When you add the *s'*, the humans and the world *s'apprivoisent*. They learn piecemeal *to familiarise themselves* to each other, to please each other slowly. They put on their nicest attire, behave with their most considerate manners and they progressively learn to get used to each other, get *closer*, become accustomed, to open up, to be attentive to each other. They do it step by step, since they know that they will always stay strangers. They will always stay vulnerable. They will always have their secrets, their mysteries. They will never know one another, they will only have the opportunity to get to. And in that irreconcilable gap, the humans grow, the world makes itself delightful and, in one enchanting image, they meet. The atmosphere of love is born.

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# F APPENDIX

## INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

Self-defined gender identity / Age / Sexual orientation /  
Self-defined cultural identity / Self-rated socioeconomic status  
(1=less fortunate, 10=most fortunate)

Avatars are not representative of the physicality of the  
participants and were assigned randomly.



Man  
73 y/o  
Heterosexual  
French  
8/10



Man  
23 y/o  
Homosexual  
French  
6/10



Man  
22 y/o  
Heterosexual  
French  
7/10



Woman  
33 y/o  
Heterosexual  
French  
8/10



Man  
36 y/o  
Bisexual  
Jewish  
7/10



Woman  
25 y/o  
Homosexual  
Martinique / French  
4/10



Woman  
21 y/o  
Heterosexual  
Spanish / French  
9/10



Woman  
22 y/o  
Bisexual  
French  
8/10



Woman  
25 y/o  
Heterosexual  
French  
7/10



Woman  
29 y/o  
Heteroflexible  
Jewish  
9/10



Woman  
21 y/o  
Heterosexual  
English / French  
7/10



Man  
46 y/o  
Heterosexual  
French  
6/10



Man  
31 y/o  
Homosexual  
Chinese  
6/10



Woman  
41 y/o  
Heterosexual  
Canadian  
4/10



Woman  
35 y/o  
Homosexual  
Française, vietnamienne,  
togolaise et polonaise  
7/10



Man  
23 y/o  
Homosexual  
French  
7/10



Woman  
22 y/o  
Heterosexual  
Lebanese  
8/10



Man  
21 y/o  
Heterosexual  
French  
4/10



Man  
66 y/o  
Heterosexual  
French  
7/10



Man  
53 y/o  
Heterosexual  
French  
2/10

