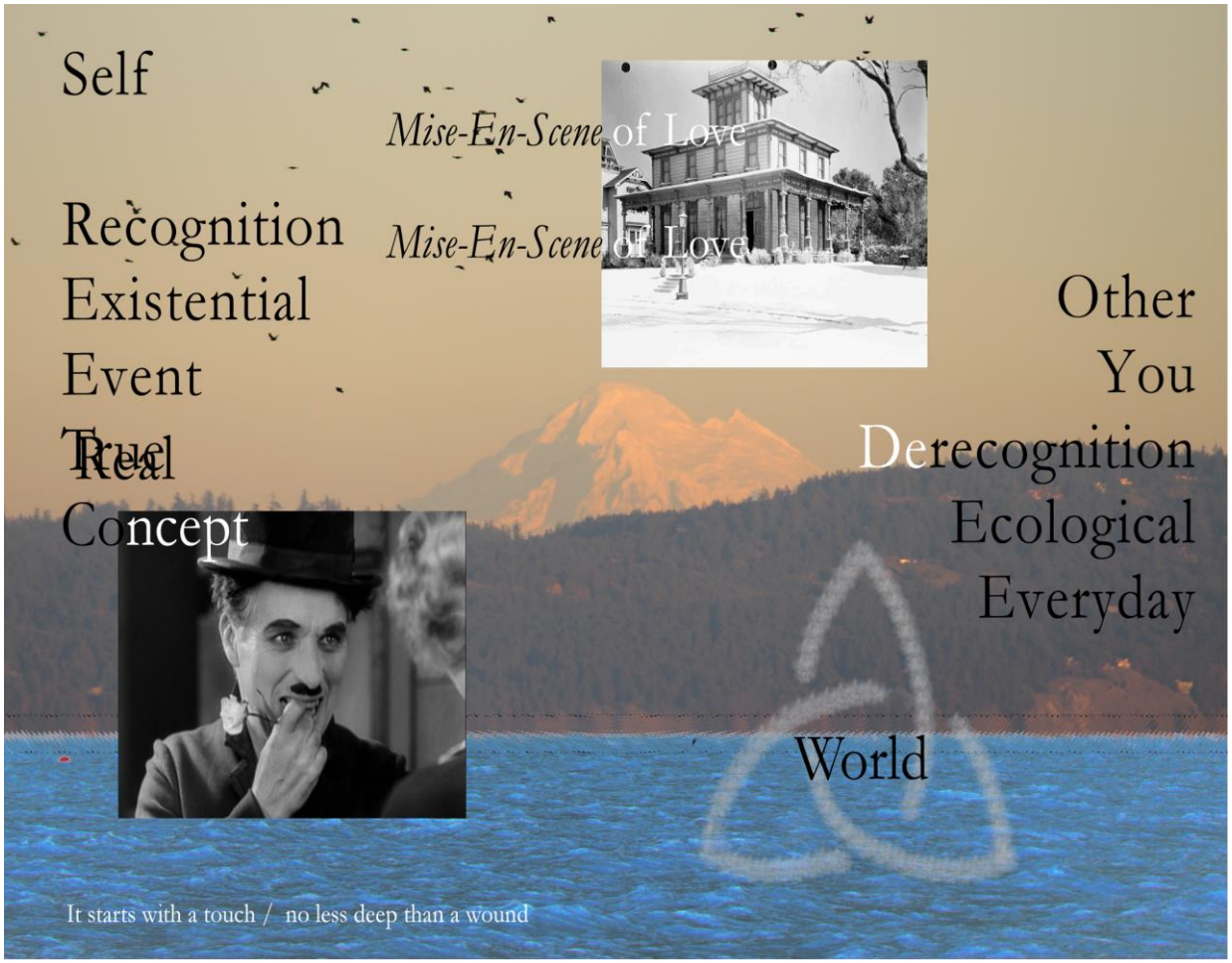
A Film-Philosophical Investigation on Aspects of Love



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The Opening

There is no total you. Good. I promise to never enclose my understanding of you. I promise to leave the space you occupy in my heart open, open to the thousand other yous that are within you. You are in flux. I take your hand and bring it to my heart. I say Yes to your twirling difference, to you becoming more different (but not more distant). Love is difference. I do not try to make you me, and you do not try to make me you. Be how you want to be, promise yourself to make space for yourself to move. We are always moving, there is no stable "us." We promise to never tie each other down in the concrete ropes of stereotypes. We are different. We defer our recognition of each other.

We listen to the radio together. You sing soprano and I sing tenor. Let us make something out of our differences. Uncontainable. Our hands reach out. Trembling. There is only uncertainty. Uncertainty of who you will become, of who I will become. Our certainty is always deferred—the line between precarity and romance grows thinner every day. Could it be any other way? Otherwise, you would not really be reaching out when you reach out. Anyway, you reach out anyway, and we fashion a world out of our trembling hands.

This world, made from love . . . no, this world made us love. The world is no supplement to love. When we share a glance, we share it with the gust blowing your hair in my face, with the smell of oak and its sticky sap on our fingertips, with that slight sense of cold that breezes through the air. When the heart breaks, where do you think it goes? Disappearance into the abyss is a myth. Love's shattering becomes scattered in the world. Before it was bitterfrost, but then: fire. My heart became inflamed. And what fed that fire but the air itself? The air between us gives us the breath to say "I love you." (Words are breaths.) Do you think the first words said by humanity were "I love you?" My eyes do not erase the world in my gaze. I see you, but also what surrounds you. I can never limit you, but I also can never limit my love to only being about "you." What grounds you—the ground itself becomes our grounds of love. Love has earth in it. In loving you, I love what enframes you. In

me, love is ready to explode into the skies. My heart swells. The sky is a perfect teal. The pine trees are trying to touch the sky. My heart is pounding out, wanting to burst out of my body to offer itself to you. Nothing can be contained. I promise to not contain you in my understanding (never could, not worth trying). I promise to not contain the world (tried when I was younger, did not go well).

The fact that you are a lacuna in my heart becomes the motor of my desire. And this desire leads me into exploring a world with you. (We do not explore the world because we have exhausted each other. No, all the wonders of the world pale in comparison to a day spent with you.) You are a mystery that grows in me more every day. Always more. Anyways, there is more. You are endless. Inexhaustible. Thinking with love, thinking with you. About you. Singing with love. (*Cogito ergo cantemus*). And I will continue to sing to you until the sun sets. "Promise?" Until the day passes. The radio is always better at night.

Let us sleep with it on, and let those detuned sounds form our love to be lovelier. Love pulls me into (y)our constellation. And what is love but the sound of you breathing as I lay on my back while watching the night continue. Morning comes. When you wake up, do you want to do the whole dance again? A new day. "Promise?" The first thing I see is your face, sculpted by the light. Where does the light come from? The birds are on a telephone next to our house, warbling melodies. When the birds sing, I sing too. I am a bird that is singing to you. Do you hear it? I will sing again, and this time, I will record it, so you remember. *Record:* to repeat by heart. Do you see now? "See what?" Must the heart be read? I will write in the key of the world. Love begins with the three: the world, me, and you. Now let me translate my song into speech.

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In this text I critically reevaluate Alain Badiou's theory of love as laid out in *In Praise of Love* and *Conditions* to offer up a new way of thinking about love. I focus on two major themes: (1) the way love (dis)orientates our understanding of otherness and (2) the way love affects (and is affected

by) how we live in the world. The first section of this essay elucidates Badiou's idea that love constructs a world from the point of view of difference. There, I delineate what Badiou means by "difference" as well as "world" in the context of love. Afterwards, I contend with the limitations of Badiou's theory of love. Though Badiou's theory lays a strong bedrock for thinking about love, it also has some major problems. In the second section of this essay, I critique Badiou's concept of "difference" by showing how it is founded on a (hetero)gendered binary through my analysis of the work of Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray. From this analysis, I put forward the concept of derecognition, which is an alternative way of understanding difference in love that overcomes the pitfalls of Badiou's view of difference, while still retaining the strengths of his theory. I extend my investigation of derecognition through an analysis of the final scene of *City Lights* (1931), directed by Charlie Chaplin. In the third section of this essay, I examine how Badiou's understanding of the world in his theory of love does not account for the significance of the ecological world amongst lovers. I draw on Irigaray's writings on air to provide grounding for a more expanded theory of love's relationship with the world. I call this expanded theory the *mise-en-scene* of love. I further develop this expanded theory by looking at the world's presence in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), directed by Vincente Minnelli. By reinventing Badiou's terms of *difference* and *world*, I produce an alternative conception of love which is grounded in Badiou's general structure of love, but which goes beyond the limits of his original theory. In doing so, I articulate a theory of love closer to our lived experience of it. I close my text with three codas, representing the three terms in my theory of love ("I", "world" and "you"). In these codas, I muse about the possibility of writing about love from the perspective of the self and the difficulties of thinking about love in a way that can embed it in everyday experience through considering the work of Badiou, Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy.

A Note on this Constellation of Thinkers

Before my analysis of Badiou, I should justify why I am limiting my space of study to a particular period. Why prioritize Derrida's definition of love over Plato's, for example? I am relying upon the work of Badiou's contemporaries to theorize love, as opposed to that of his influences (like Plato), because of a commonality I have observed between thinkers of love in this period. There is a thread of similarity that connects the ways that Badiou, Derrida, Nancy, and Irigaray think about love. Derrida describes his relationship to his contemporary era as follows:

> It would be easy to show that the times of those who seem to belong to the same epoch, defined in terms of something like a historical frame or social horizon, remain infinitely heterogeneous and, to tell the truth, completely unrelated to one another. One can be very sensitive to this, though sensitive at the same time, on another level, to a being-together that no difference or differend can threaten. This being-together is not distributed in any homogeneous way in our experience. There are knots, points of great condensation, places of high valuation, paths of decision or interpretation that are virtually unavoidable. It is there, it seems, that the law is produced. Being-together refers to and recognizes itself there.[1]

The thinkers I am examining are knotted in an epoch through a process of "being together," sharing a theoretical vocabulary amongst each other. Although my project will not erase the philosophical nuances that each theorist elaborates, it nevertheless inspects their work through a framework that seeks to understand how they embody the "being together" to which Derrida refers. Grouping these thinkers under the category of "contemporary French philosophy" allows me to unravel the "knots, points of great condensation, [and] places of high valuation"[2] shared amongst them. In this way, I

[1] Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" in *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 55.
[2] Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," 55.

will develop a theorization of love by contrasting Badiou's use of the terms "other,"[3] "difference" and "world" with his contemporaries' use of these terms.

Alain Badiou and *In Praise of Love*

In *In Praise of Love*, Badiou describes love as "an existential project [that aims] to construct a world from a decentered point of view other than that of [one's] mere impulse to survive or re-affirm [one's] own identity."[4] For Badiou, love offers us the possibility to imagine what a world would look like when it is constructed from the point of view of difference. Badiou posits that love is founded on the Two—on the difference between self and other. Love entangles us with the other, allowing us to see the world from this entangled perspective. It refashions my world and your world into "our" world.

For Badiou, the primary obstacle of love is the self, which strives to engage in the world from its own point of view over the entangled perspective of the Two that is created through difference.[5] "My love's main enemy, the one I must defeat," he writes, "is not the other, it is myself, the 'myself' that prefers identity to difference, that prefers to impose its world against the world re-constructed through the filter of difference."[6] The enemy of love is the part of "myself" that wants to impose its own will over the differences between the self and other. When I assert that my world, my point of view, is more important than your world, than our world, I act "narcissistically."[7] In doing so, I resist the truth of love.

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[3] It is generative to distinguish between Other and other. For this project, when I refer to "Other" I speak to the concept of the Other itself. Meanwhile, if I refer to "other" I mean a specific, lived other person one interacts with. Put differently, the other is a person while the Other is the encounter with difference itself.

[4] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 25.

[5] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 60.

[6] ibid, 60.

[7] ibid, 19.

In Badiou's system, love is one of the four truths (the other three being art, politics, and science). For Badiou, love expresses the truth of a world created on the basis of difference as opposed to identity.[8] In asserting that love is a truth, Badiou inscribes love in the irreducible singularity of an amorous encounter.[9] For Badiou, an event is the happening of "something that cannot be reduced to its ordinary inscription in 'what there is.'… [The event] compels us to decide a *new* way of being."[10] He later says that events "are irreducible singularities, the 'beyond-the-law' of situations."[11] Events cannot be predicted or anticipated from one's given circumstances, but occur like a lightning bolt and reveal a new way of existing. They are "unpredictable supplement[s]"[12] that reveal something outside the current framework of "instituted knowledge."[13] Badiou emphasizes that events are not miracles that occur out of the blue but are "situated"[14]—that is, they arise from a situation, even if they break from that situation. In the case of love, love arises from a contingent encounter that randomly occurs. I do not expect to love. Instead, I am thrust into love. A touch, a shared moment, a gesture, a look, or a word may puncture my world and call me to fall in love. This falling in love emerges from material conditions, but breaks from those conditions by causing me to rethink how I am structuring my life. The encounter in love punctures my whole being, creating a hole in my heart in order to make room for an other.

An event can turn into a truth through fidelity, which is the state of being "faithful to an event."[15] Fidelity "amounts to a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself"[16]—fidelity means following through with an event. In love, I can be faithful to an event

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[8] ibid, 22.
[9] Alain Badiou, "What is Love?" in *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 184.
[10] Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 41.
[11] Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, 44.
[12] ibid, 67.
[13] ibid, 67.
[14] ibid, 68.
[15] ibid, 41.
[16] ibid, 67.

by following through with an amorous encounter. Following through with this encounter does not simply mean seeing a potential lover again but involves a complete reworking of my "ordinary way of 'living'."[17] For example, my beloved and I may choose to maintain fidelity to the event through the declaration "I love you." In the phrase "I love you," we promise to be faithful to each other by continuing to love each other. Thus, love turns from a contingency to a continued process of developing a relationship together.[18] Meanwhile, if I experience an amorous event and choose not to pursue it, then I would be unfaithful to this event as I would not further investigate it.[19]

If one is faithful to an event, that event turns to a truth. This truth does not exist in a transcendent "heaven,"[20] but is immanently constructed "bit by bit" through what the fidelity to the event "gathers together and produces."[21] Truth for Badiou "punches a 'hole' in knowledges,"[22] thereby generating new ways of knowing the world. If my beloved and I continue to be faithful to the event by overcoming obstacles[23] in order to reaffirm our initial declaration of love,[24] then, bit by bit, a truth of love will emerge. This truth does not occur instantaneously but coagulates through multiple encounters with the other. Moreover, "the process of truth *induces* a subject"[25]—the subject "is absolutely nonexistent in the situation 'before' the event."[26] My beloved and I are fundamentally changed by the process of love. A totally new type of subjectivity is created between us that "e*xceeds*

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[17] ibid, 42.

[18] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 45.

[19] Badiou argues the grounds of evil arise out of the various betrayals of the event. For Badiou, evil takes three forms: the simulacrum of an event, the betrayal of an event, or disaster, which is identifying "truth with total power" (*Ethics* 71).

[20] Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, 43.

[21] Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, 68.

[22] Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, 70.

[23] Though Badiou claims the main enemy of love is the self, we can easily include other obstacles of love to his theory to make it more relevant to lived experience as a political subject. Financial inequalities, restrictions in immigration, regimes that outlaw particular formations of intimacies—these obstacles, to name a few, are major enemies of love that make it harder for lovers to love in a world.

[24] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 51.

[25] Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, 43.

[26] Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, 43.

[us] both."[27] This subjectivity represents a new construction of the world based on difference. As I learn more about the other, and as I navigate situations together with the other, my subjectivity expands to account for the other's perspective. Over time, my subjectivity and their subjectivity combine to create a totally new subjectivity that contains both of our perspectives. We learn how to act together as a subject in the world, constructing a new world based on our Twoness. Love induces a subject constituted by difference between Two. The subject of love is the subject of togetherness itself.

At this point, there are two major terms that underlie Badiou's account of love that need defining: "difference" (specifically, the "difference" between "Two") and "world." Badiou's account of love entangles the *inner* experience of love with the *outer* result of love. For Badiou, love is both an inner experience of difference *and* an outer construction of a world through that difference. He separates the experience of difference from the construction of a world based on difference. He writes that "it is essential to grasp that the construction of the world on the basis of difference is quite distinct from the experience of difference."[28] In doing so, he argues that love is more than a mere experience of difference. The experience of difference is a passing sensation that is felt internally, while the construction of a world on the basis of difference results in the creation of something outside the self that lasts. Certainly, an inner experience of the other is part of love, but love also occurs outside the experiential as a construction of a world through difference. Love is a "re-invention of life,"[29] which means that it reinvents both our experience of life and our actual life. Perhaps the most concrete example of how love reinvents life is "the birth of a child," provided this child "is born from within love."[30] The child, as something outside the experience of difference

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[27] Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, 43.
[28] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 23.
[29] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 33.
[30] ibid, 26.

between two lovers, reinvents how those two lovers experience their lives.[31] Of course, two lovers do not need to have a child to reinvent their lives. This reinvention of life takes place when the two lovers change their material conditions and diurnal habits such that their lives become qualitatively different from how it was before. This reinvention creates a break in their existence, such that they can never fully go back to how their life was before they reinvented it. When two lovers immigrate to another country, adopt a cat, or devote the next few months to working on an art project together, they produce a significant enough change in their day-to-day existence such that they reinvent their lives.

Yet, before we can talk more about the outer result of love, we need to have a clear notion of what Badiou means by the word "difference" when he refers to love as "the encounter between two differences."[32] To understand "difference," we need to examine how Badiou conceptualizes the Two in love. When Badiou refers to the "Two," he is referring to Masculine and the Feminine subject positions.[33] He adds that a man can occupy the Feminine position and a woman can occupy the Masculine position of love.[34] Nevertheless, the Masculine and Feminine are disjunct. Every lover

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[31] The term "reinvention" is critical in Badiou's conception of love. Badiou's project is to offer up a "reinvention of love" (Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 12). On the surface, Badiou is reinventing love against a neoliberal capitalistic concept of love. Here, love is reduced to a service that can be "bought," from a dating agency, and it becomes a riskless investment experienced "without the fall" and without any risks (6). However, on another level, Badiou is also reinventing a tradition of thinking love which emphasizes unity over difference. Barthes points out that one great myth of love is the "dream of total union with the loved being" (Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 226). We can find this myth in Aristotle, who names "total union: 'the sole and simple pleasure"' (Barthes, 226). This unifying love is the endless search for one's missing half, as Aristophane's puts in *The Symposium*. This tradition of oneness is seen again in the Bible, wherein Genesis 2:24 it is written that "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24 ESV). Likewise, Hegel calls "True union" "love proper," and says again that "This union in love is complete" (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Love" in *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings* by George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, trans. T.M. Knox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 303.) For Hegel, love aspires toward union, even if it never gets there. Badiou's thesis that love is an experience of difference problematizes love as a union. This is not to say there is not an element of union in Badiou's conception of love. Instead of elevating difference as the motor of love, we can read Badiou as arguing difference is just as important in love as union.

[32] ibid, 29.

[33] Alain Badiou, "What is Love?" 183.

[34] Badiou gets the categories of Masculine and Feminine from Jacques Lacan. Briefly put, for Lacan, the Masculine and Feminine are not biological categories but symbolic categories that determine our subjectivity.

is "wholly" other.[35] This disjuncture is *total* for Badiou: "nothing in the experience is the same from the position of man or from that of woman. Nothing."[36] Therefore, for Badiou, the difference between two lovers is the difference between Masculine and Feminine subject positions. Love is the paradox of constructing a world based on the disjuncture between the two categories of Masculine and Feminine.[37] Through its ability to construct a world from this total disjuncture, love generates a new truth.[38] Badiou writes that "truths are sexuated. In other words . . . there is a feminine science and a masculine science… a feminine love (strategically homosexual, as certain feminist orientations have rigorously affirmed) and a masculine love."[39] Love is the truth procedure that unifies the Masculine truth with the Feminine truth. In addition, love ties a knot around all of Badiou's truth categories: it ensures that the truths of art, politics, and science are not solely expressed from a single sexuated position but constructed through the disjuncture between the Masculine and the Feminine perspectives.[40]

The limits of Badiou's account become apparent when we note that asserting that the Two is the disjuncture between Masculine and Feminine places "man" and "woman" in a predescribed gendered structure. Badiou provides the following diagram to explore the difference between "woman" and "man."

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[35] This is a pun on Derrida's famous phrase *tout autre est tout autre*, found in much of work. See for example, in Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship,* trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 232.
[36] Alain Badiou, "What is Love?" 183.
[37] ibid, 186.
[38] ibid, 184.
[39] ibid, 186.
[40] ibid, 196.

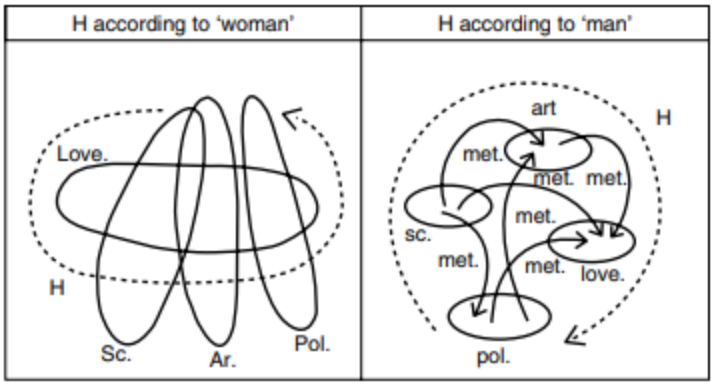

Figure 1, from *Conditions*[41]

In defining "Man" and "Woman", he writes:

> 'Man' I shall define axiomatically as the amorous position that couples imperative and motionlessness, and 'woman' as the position that couples wandering and narrative. These axioms readily intersect with both crass and précieux clichés: man is he (or she) who does nothing, I mean nothing obvious for and in the name of love, because he considers that once something is won it stays won without having to be proved again. Woman is she (or he) who makes love voyage, and wants her word to be reiterated and renewed. Or, in the vocabulary of conflict: 'man' is silent and violent; 'woman' gossips and makes demands (est revendicatif).[42]

In this description, Badiou encloses difference within a set of (hetero)gendered performances. Difference is between the silent "man" and the gossiping "woman." The disjuncture between the Two in love, for Badiou, is already a pre-inscribed path of the Masculine and Feminine subject positions that the couple is supposed to follow. The Two are assigned differences to enact. Difference, in Badiou's account, is understood through a (hetero)gendered binary that

[41] ibid, 197.
[42] ibid, 193.

supposes/imposes that Feminine and Masculine subjects act in a certain way. Later in this text, I will critique Badiou's naming of the Two as Masculine and Feminine. Instead, I theorize a different way of perceiving the difference between the Two to produce a more capacious manner of thinking about love. Love involves Two, but these two do not have to be named.

However, before I move onto this critique, I must also explain how Badiou positions love with respect to the world. If love is a construction of a world, we must ask what Badiou means by "world." In charting out love's relationship to the world, Badiou writes:

> Here, I am opposing "construction" to "experience." When I lean on the shoulder of the woman I love, and can see, let's say, the peace of twilight over a mountain landscape. . . and the sun about to disappear behind craggy peaks, and know–not from the expression on her face, but from within the world as it is–that the woman I love is seeing the same world, and that this convergence is part of the world…. The fact is she and I are now incorporated into this unique Subject, the Subject of love that views the panorama of the world through the prism of our difference, so this world can be conceived, be born, and not simply represent what fills my own individual gaze.[43]

Badiou here suggests that love constructs the world in such a way that the two lovers—who now form one Subject—view the world through a "prism" that respects their differences rather than representing one lover's individual viewpoint. More generally in his oeuvre, Badiou posits an ontological conception of the world, which he describes as not a single world but rather "an irreducible multiplicity of worlds, each of which is identified with its own logic of appearing."[44] Although he does not provide a direct link between this ontological definition of the world and the

[43] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 25-26.
[44] Steven Corcoran, "Worlds" in *The Badiou Dictionary*, ed. Steven Corcoran (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 396.

world created by two lovers, in both instances, the world in question is constructed from more than one perspective. In this essay, I am less interested in his ontological definition of the world than I am in how he relates love to the world. In the above quotation, he offers a poetic description, which includes the image of "the peace of twilight over a mountain landscape."[45] More broadly speaking, we know that he believes that the world the lovers construct does not exist "materially," but is instead "an existential project."[46] This existential project is, more specifically, an existential world; that is, it is the shared crossing between me and you.[47] The world is defined three ways at the same time: I am the one who shares the world with you, you are the one who shares the world with me, and the world is the crossing in which we can share it with each other.[48]

Badiou's twilight example reveals that a lover does not only see the twilight and their beloved watching the twilight. Instead, the beloved watching the twilight is part of the lover's conceptualization of the twilight itself. Love is not an inward private relationship between two people but a reinvention of the world itself. It is a navigation of the world not from the lover's narcissistic viewpoint but rather as an intersubjective endeavor.

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[45] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 25.

[46] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 25.

[47] Badiou's contemporary, Jean-Luc Nancy, describes this existential world as a world of sharing. Nancy writes, "The shared world as the world of concerning-for-the-other is a world of the crossing of singular beings by this sharing itself that constitutes them" (Jean-Luc Nancy, "Shattered Love" in *The Inoperative Community,* trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 83.) For Nancy, the shared world of love is a world where my being is defined by me sharing the world with you and you with me. Nancy's vision of the world posits there is no stable foundation of the world, no essence of the world, which proceeds its existence. Instead, the world is defined three ways: between me, you, and the world. We can apply this definition of "the world" to Badiou's notion of the existential world of two lovers in order to understand the world's place in love. In love, "our" world is the world we share with each other.

[48] A good illustration of the existential world is the experience of empathy. Empathy is not simply that I am feeling what you are feeling, nor is it me and you feeling the same thing. Instead, empathy is a bridge between our two feelings that leads us to our shared existential world. For example, I may be feeling angry over something that happened to you, while you may feel afraid. Though these feelings are not the same, I end up having access to you through this feeling. We end up sharing feelings between us, communicating to each other through our feelings. Empathy is my you-feeling and it is your me-feeling. Through empathy, we end up occupying an existential world. This existential world is the shared flow of emotions that is between us and that connects us to each other.

For Badiou, the other transforms my relationship with twilight. Badiou points out that the epiphany in looking at a twilight with one's beloved is the realization that the one "I love is seeing the same world, and that this convergence is part of the world," that it is "within the world as it is."[49] That is to say, the world I am seeing is not my world but, for a moment, "our world." Looking at a twilight makes me realize that the one I love "and I are now incorporated into this unique Subject, the Subject of love that views the panorama of the world through the prism of our difference."[50] For Badiou, viewing the twilight when I am in love makes me realize that my subjectivity is not simply my own but rather a shared subjecthood between a you and a me. The twilight becomes a prism for me into the world of the other. The other, in turn, transforms how I see the twilight and the world.

When I look at a twilight with someone I love, our mutual bond grows through this shared experience. The twilight is not simply a pleasurable site that the other and I both see, but the literal grounds of an encounter between the other and myself. The twilight becomes a site in which I learn more about the other. The other may tell me what the twilight means to them, tell me stories of gazing at the twilight as a child, just as I will tell them similar stories. The twilight becomes a place in which parts of the other I did not know can come to the foreground. In this way, the twilight gives me a fuller impression of the other. It becomes my crossing into the other's world. It is significant to reiterate that viewing the twilight in this manner is a *construction* of a world as opposed to a single pleasant shared experience. The world created between the other and I is a world that lasts.

One concrete way the act of viewing a twilight with a loved one constructs a world is by reconfiguring how one views twilights. In viewing the twilight with the one I love, I find that the stories, the gestures, and the looks that I have shared with the other start to haunt the twilight itself. In the future, when I look at the twilight, I notice that my view of it has shifted. I notice that instead

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[49] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 25.
[50] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 25.

of reflecting on my own individual history with twilights, I reflect upon the stories that my beloved has told me about twilights, as well as upon the moments that I have shared with them underneath it. The way I traverse the world and twilights has changed from being grounded in my own individuality to being grounded in a view of the world from the perspective of Two.

In Badiou's account on love, the construction of the world *must* be between Two. He writes, "There is no third position. The idea of a third position engages the function of the imaginary: this involves the angel."[51] For Badiou, the grounds for the world of love are entirely created by the lover and the beloved: there is no third part, no "angel," who helps construct this world. It is a fantasy to think that some outside Third has agency in shaping a love affair. As a result, for Badiou, the fact that love constructs a world does not imply that the world constructs love. The twilight is not part of love but rather a tool for the lovers to meet and access each other.

In other words, it is the difference between the lovers—and their ability to view the twilight from their distinctive perspectives—that contributes to the truth of love. Twilight would be insignificant in the context of love if it were not a point at which the perspectives of the two lovers intertwine in a unique world-generating encounter—one that would be impossible for any other two people to replicate. Simply put, there is a distinction between the world as it stands—with its twilights, sunrises, and other natural occurrences—and the inimitable world that emerges from the commingling of the viewpoints of two people in love.

Thus, Badiou does not neglect the world's relationship to love; he accurately emphasizes that the world is important in love. However, his analysis of love is so tied up in the truth of the Two that it precludes the possibility of a more orbital perspective, which would include the world in love's truth. My intervention is to develop a truth of the Three. I would like to argue that love involves Three. The third term—in addition to you and I—is the world itself. Love is a dance

[51] Alain Badiou, "What is Love?" 183.

between the self, the other, and the world. My relationship with the environment changes just as the environment changes my relationship with love. When I view the twilight with my beloved, it shapes my relationship with the world and love as an ecological phenomenon. The twilight is not solely a means to construct of an existential world; instead, the ecological world has agency in how it molds a love affair. However, before I make this argument, I need to critique Badiou's concept of difference and the Two.

It is important to critique Badiou's concept of difference due to its entanglement in a heteronormative vision of subjectivity. Moreover, when it comes to Badiou's concept of the world, I am mostly merely adding layers to his theorization of the relationship between the world and love. In contrast, I am explicitly criticizing his understanding of difference. I therefore develop an alternative to Badiou's language of difference and Twoness in such a way that I can develop the mise-en-scene of love without the specter of heteronormative language. Once I have established this alternative concept of difference and the Two, I can proceed to theorize the world between lovers.

The Theory of Derecognition: Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray: Love as a Deferral of Recognition for the Other

When Nikhil Padgaonkar asked Derrida to comment on the link between deconstruction and love, Derrida responded that love, in the context of deconstruction, "means an affirmative desire towards the Other—to respect the Other, to pay attention to the Other, not to destroy the otherness of the Other."[52] Derrida thus argues that love involves a respect for the otherness of the other. He points out that love is not about unifying the self with the other. Instead, love is about maintaining and respecting the boundary between the self and the other's otherness. Building on this Derridean entanglement of deconstruction and love, I am suggesting that love involves *derecognition.*

[52]Jacques Derrida, "An interview with Jacques Derrida," Interview by Nikhil Padgaonkar, 1997.

Plainly put, what derecognition means is that recognition between lovers is structured like a deconstruction.[53] This is not to say that recognition between lovers *is* a deconstruction but that recognizing the other requires us to constantly defer our interpretation of that other.[54] In using the phrase "like a deconstruction," I want to focus on one specific property of love, namely that the construction of our recognition of an other is always deferred. When I defer my recognition of the other, I derecognize this other.

Turning to the work of Irigaray in *I love to you* allows me to flesh out the notion of recognition between lovers. In *I love to you*, Irigaray uses Hegel's framework of recognition to put forward her own theory of recognition between lovers. Irigaray writes that "recognizing you means… [halting] before you as before something insurmountable, a mystery, a freedom that will never be mine, a subjectivity that will never be mine."[55] Irigaray uses the term *recognition* to explore how my understanding of my self mediates my understanding of the other. She points out that recognizing the other is not about "correctly" understanding the other but involves approaching the other as a mystery. For Irigaray, I do not have to comprehend someone to love them. I may constantly misunderstand a loved one, but that does not mean that I do not love them. Part of love is the humbling experience of accepting the limits of my understanding of the other while still loving them nonetheless. (Similarly, the other will not always understand me, but that does not negate their love.) This is not to say that I should not try to understand the other but that the stakes of love do

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[53] This is a pun on Lacan's maxim "The unconscious is structured like a language"—a phrase which can be found throughout his work. See for example, in Jacques Lacan, "Science and Truth" in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 737.

[54] Here, I aim not to explicate Derrida's theory of love—something an author like Akira Lippit does excellently in Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Cinema without Reflection: Jacques Derrida's Echopoiesis and Narcissim Adrift*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). Instead, in a gesture that honours Derrida, I am building my own theory of derecognition through fragments of Derrida, de(re)contextualizing these sentences in order to create new meanings. In this way, I will not spend much time explaining the basis of deconstruction because I mention the important parts of deconstruction for my theory of derecognition implicitly in my exploration of Derrida.

[55] Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), 104.

not lie in whether I am perfectly understood or not. In fact, for Irigaray, the lack of understanding is precisely what enflames my desire. Irigaray writes, "You will never be entirely visible to me, but, thanks to that, I respect you as different from me. *What I do not see of you draws me towards you.*"[56] I am drawn to someone not simply because they are similar to me, or because they understand some essential "I" that the rest of the world does not understand, but because they are different from me.

Now that some background regarding recognition between lovers and the affirmation of otherness has been established, I want to further develop my claim that *recognition between lovers is structured like a deconstruction*, i.e., that love is a derecognition. Recognition between lovers is like a deconstruction insofar as it acknowledges a slippage in our understanding of otherness. Our recognition of the other in love reveals to us an other who is not a stable entity but an endless chain of references to an always absent thing. They escape our grasp. They elude our ability to confine and categorize. Put again, the other is wholly Other.[57] Derecognition represents the lover's attempt to resist enclosing the beloved's identity; this resistance celebrates the beloved's mystery. Sometimes when we start off in love, we strive to erase the otherness of the other, to obtain an image of the other that corresponds to our ideal of how they should be. Of course this does not always happen, but sometimes we too closely enmeshes our perceptions of our beloved with our own desires and fantasies, producing a projection of that beloved. We may find ourselves infatuated with this idealized image of our beloved over the actual beloved themselves.

By creating an image of the other, we establish a hierarchy of their features that privileges what we deem primary and marginalizes the rest. This hierarchy becomes harmful when the other

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[56] Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History,* 104 (my emphasis).

[57] Here, I am again referencing Derrida's famous phrase *tout autre est tout autre,* found in such work as Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship,* 232. However, whereas my application of this pun to Badiou's work was meant to show that for Badiou the (hetero)gendered difference between the two lovers is totally other, here, the reference to Derrida serves to highlight that a lover is always limited in their recognition of their beloved—there is always a part of the beloved which is unknown to them.

does not live up to our idealized perception. We may feel betrayed, angry, or lied to when we realize that the other was not what we projected them to be.[58] By contrast, when we derecognize, we resist the urge to hierarchize our beloved's features based on our interpretations. Instead, we create an open space where we encourage the other to come to us on their own terms, while simultaneously recognizing the impossibility of having pure access to this other. We welcome the other's mystery, and by doing so, we accept the fluidity of their otherness; that is, we accept that we can never stabilize their subjectivity, and we welcome that their personality, their beliefs, their behaviors, their dreams, their goals, and so forth are always subject to flux.

In love, my conceptions of myself and my beloved inevitably change. As the days turn into weeks, I find my beloved changes to become a different person. Moreover, not only does my perception of my beloved change in love but also my definition of love changes. This change in love, this effacement of my original mode of relating to love, then prompts another transformation in how I perceive my beloved, which, in turn, redefines my understanding of love. I cannot have a stable recognition of the other with whom I am in love. I love someone, and they change, but I still love them. How I love them does not stay the same, yet I reserve a space in my heart for them just the same. Derecognition gestures at the difficult task of loving the same someone who never stays the same.

Though derecognition is difficult, it is ultimately an act of care and acceptance. Here, I differentiate my concept of derecognition from misrecognition.[59] Misrecognition is a violent act that

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[58] Mari Ruti (who happens to be my supervisor), makes a similar argument about the relationship between idealization, recognition and love in *The Summons of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[59] There are many critics of misrecognition. Misrecognition is a type of colonial violence in Frantz Fanon's analysis of recognition in *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008); it is taken up as a kind of injustice in Nancy Fraser's work; it is fundamental in the process of interpellation in Louis Althusser's work. The general point, though, is that misrecognition is often a bad thing. What I am doing is not trying to add to this discourse of misrecognition and argue it is ethical, but create between the terms recognition and misrecognition, a third term: derecognition.

suppresses the other's identity. It is a refusal to recognize a significant part of the other's lived reality, often in order to justify mistreatment of that other. Derecognition, on the other hand, is an ethical attitude we take within love, wherein we halt our recognition of our beloved, accepting that our fantasies of our beloved may not correspond to who they actually are. When we approach the other through derecognition, we diminish our attachment to our expectations of who that other is. Whereas misrecognition is often an active act of violence, derecognition prevents the violence of forcing our image of the other onto this other. Misrecognition is a matter of actively imposing something on the other, of not letting the other speak on their own terms. Derecognition, in contrast, is a matter of recognizing the limits of our faculties of interpretation and of letting the other come to us on their own terms.

Here is where my critique of Badiou's concept of the Two and difference becomes apparent. Understanding that we cannot have a stable concept of our beloved implies that love cannot be the expression of a stable or definable Masculine or Feminine truth. Love prevents us from anchoring down any clear structure that either I or the other can fall into; it is always redefining our relation to others and redefining itself. There are still Two in love, but the Two are not named Masculine or Feminine—the two people in love do not have any obligation to be faithful to living out a Masculine or a Feminine truth with one another. The lovers do not have to view themselves as "man" or "woman." Instead, they are named self and other. That is, their interpretation of each other is open. It is wrought by their day-to-day existence. The relationship between self and other is subject to the conditions that ground the encounter itself, the shared gestures between the Two, as opposed to an outside truth procedure that shapes this encounter. Put again, love does not follow any predefined path, but its path is created in the encounter and the relation between self and other.

If my recognition of the other lies in trying to fit them into a framework of Masculine/Feminine truth, then my love is only *my love* founded on my image of love, as opposed to

being cocreated between the other and I. In trying to make a relationship by creating a world through *my* vision of what "Masculine" and "Feminine" should be, I end up being the "enemy of love" [60] that Badiou himself warns us against. Instead, to construct a world from the perspective of the Two, I must take seriously that the other and their perspective elude me. Thus, the framework that we—I and the other—use to construct our shared world is constantly being negotiated on the basis of our differences rather than on the basis of our solipsistic or self-centered ideals regarding what love should look like. There are ways of understanding our difference from our beloved that do not need to revert to a Masculine/Feminine binary. If the truth of love "needs" a Masculine/Feminine superstructure, I ponder how important a "true" love is in the first place. We do not need a "true" love bound up by heteronormative binaries. We need a real love: a love that speaks to our real perplexing experience of ourselves and each other. I am suggesting that an alternative model to conceive the "Two" and "difference" in love is to recognize the mystery of the other. I neither know the other nor what they represent.

For Badiou, the "difference" between lovers is rooted in known (hetero)gendered categories. My alternative view is that this difference is an unknown one. The difference between you and me is constantly being deferred; I can never pin down how exactly you are other to me. In fact, you may not even be other to me—we may be the same in many fundamental ways. Nonetheless, it does not matter whether you are totally different from me or whether you fit in a (hetero)gendered category. I cannot know who you fully *are* because who you are is always mediated by my recognition. Thus, I recognize that I am always limited in my recognition of you and that there is always something more in you than what I can access. Difference, instead of being total, is deferred, leading me to discover that you are boundlessly inexhaustible.

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[60] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 60.

In love, I realize that I can only see one perspective of you, but that there are an infinite number of angles to which you could be viewed. I am pushed to look at you in new ways, to not limit my understanding of you to a single perspective. Though I can only see you from one perspective at a time that does not mean that I let that one perspective define you. I can continually shift my understanding of you: I can view you as an ironist today, and as an earnest person tomorrow. Still, even if I am constantly changing my perspective of you, I know I can never fully comprehend you. You never appear to me as whole, but instead as a hole in my perception. You are not whole but a hole, ruptured and open, unable to be contained. This hole in my perception tells me that I should not turn you into a whole, a complete image. Instead, you reserve a spot in me as a lacuna, as something in me that makes holes in my heart, that makes me realize the limits of my interpretation as always partial and full of holes.

Derecognition in *City Lights*

Before I end this section, I want to ground the concept of derecognition by analyzing the ending of *City Lights* (1931), directed by Charlie Chaplin. Slavoj Žižek provides an extensive synopsis of the film that I will use given that it summarizes the film through the lens of recognition. Žižek's synopsis emphasizes that the girl has a fantasy image of the tramp for the entire film, until the final scene, where that image is broken and the girl can finally see the tramp as he is:

> *City Lights* is a story about a tramp's [Charlie Chaplin] love for a blind girl [Virginia Cherrill] selling flowers on a busy street who mistakes him for a rich man. Through a series of adventures with an eccentric millionaire… the tramp gets his hands on the money needed for an operation to restore the poor girl's sight; whereupon he is arrested for theft and sentenced to prison. After he has done his time… he sees the girl. The operation was successful and she now runs a thriving business, but still awaits the Prince Charming of her

> dreams, whose chivalrous gift enabled her sight to be restored…. The tramp immediately recognizes her, whereas she doesn't recognize him, because all she knows of him is his voice and the touch of his hand. . . . Upon seeing him lose his rose (a souvenir of her). . . she steps out on the pavement, gives him a new rose and presses a coin into his hand. At this precise moment, as their hands meet, she finally recognizes him by his touch. She is immediately sobered and asks him: "You?" The tramp nods and, pointing to her eyes, asks her: "You can see now?" The girl answers: "Yes, I can see now"; the film then cuts to a medium close-up of the tramp, his eyes filled with dread and hope, smiling shyly, uncertain what the girl's reaction will be, satisfied and at the same time insecure at being so totally exposed to her—and this is the end of the movie.[61]

I will use Žižek's reading of the film as a jumping off point for my theorization. I differ from his view of the film by being more optimistic. For Žižek, the tramp's final look is "filled with *dread* and hope, smiling shyly, *uncertain* what the girl's reaction will be."[62] In Žižek's inquiry into the ending, it is ambiguous whether the girl will accept the tramp:

> With the final scene . . . the tramp finally exposes himself in his presence… we must accept him or refuse him. [Chaplin] decided to end the movie in such a brusque, unexpected way, at the very moment of the tramp's exposure: the film does *not* answer the question "Will the girl accept him or not?"—The idea that she will and that the two of them will live happily ever after has no foundation whatsoever in the film…. [The film] is over at the moment of absolute uncertainty and openness when the girl—and, together with her, we the spectator—is confronted directly with the question of the "love for her neighbor." Is this ridiculous

[61] Slavoj Žižek, "Why Does a *Letter* Always Arrive at its Destination" in *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3-4.
[62] Slavoj Žižek, "Why Does a *Letter* Always Arrive at its Destination," 3 (my emphasis).

> clumsy creature whose massive presence strikes us all of a sudden with an almost unbearable proximity really worthy of her love? Will she be able to accept, to take upon herself this social outcast that she has got in answer to her ardent desire?[63]

On a purely textual level, Žižek is correct to point out that there is no explicit proof that the two will live happily ever after. In Žižek's account, the film *refuses* the happy ending, but as a result, it poses a question to love. This is not only a question of a "love for [the] neighbor"[64] but also a question of an erotic love engulfed with "ardent desire."[65] Could the tramp ever be together with the girl, now that the girl knows he is a tramp? For Žižek, the ending of the film cuts before we get any closure on the love story, making us ponder what will happen afterwards. The film asks: can a beloved truly accept me once I expose myself to them and their image of me is shattered? In classic Žižekian fashion, he jumps to analyzing other texts instead of fully exploring *City Lights,* but the general claim he makes is that the moment of complete exposure is an example of the "traumatic presence" of the Lacanian real.[66] When the tramp exposes himself to the girl, she is confronted with the real, and must choose to persist in love in the face of this real. That is, the girl must accept the limits of her fantasy. I will diverge from Žižek's reading by offering a reading of the film wherein the girl has already made her decision to keep loving the tramp.

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[63] Slavoj Žižek, "Why Does a *Letter* Always Arrive at its Destination," 7.

[64] ibid, 7.

[65] ibid, 7.

[66] ibid, 23. Lacan's concept of the real is a complex concept that changes throughout Lacan's career. In Žižek's text, the real is presymbolic and prelinguistic and serves as a battleground between the life and death drives. The process of derecognition is less concerned with whether the girl encounters the real of the tramp, and more concerned with the ways the girl always mediates her recognition of the tramp. Instead of trying to discover the real of an other—which is impossible, as we always interact through linguistic and symbolic structures—derecognition is about loosening up one's relationship with their interpretation and fantasy of an other person.

If we read the love relation between the tramp and the girl solely through the lens of the girl's "ardent desire"[67] or the fantasy of the "Prince Charming of her dreams,"[68] the concluding scene of *City Lights* seems ambiguous. We do not know what will happen to desire or fantasy once illusion has been broken. Yet love resides beyond fantasy and desire. I contend that if we read the film through the logic of love (if there can be a logic of love . . .), then it appears that the girl accepts the tramp because she can derecognize him.

In understanding how part of loving an other is deferring recognition of them, the girl discovers that her beloved is not exactly who she imagines them to be. It is true that the girl never encounters the tramp as a tramp, only as a charitable gentleman. Indeed, she creates an enclosure over the tramp's identity and understands her relationship with him through her set structure of beliefs about him. However, the girl does not need to predicate her love on her fantasy of the tramp's wealth. There is something more to her love for the tramp than his capital—if there was not, she would have fallen in love with one of the numerous rich gentlemen who were trying to court her after she regained her vision. When the girl comes to realize that the tramp is the charitable gentleman she had fantasized about, she does not recoil in disappointment. Though she is surprised, she looks at the tramp with the utmost compassion. The girl understands that there are limits to her image of what her lover may "look" like. I refer to "look" in a double sense: due to having been blind most of her life, the girl knows that her imagination of the physical "look" of others is limited, but she also recognizes that, as a subject in love, her knowledge of how an other "looks" is never complete. We derecognize because we realize that there is more to our love than how an other looks." The girl's image of her beloved becomes shattered when she realizes the tramp is not a rich gentleman, but in that shattering, love has a chance to be reinvented.

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[67] ibid, 7.
[68] ibid, 3.

This reinvention of love reflects how derecognition critiques a (hetero)gendered, binary understanding of difference. Though *City Lights* is bound up in stereotypical depictions of gender, the girl's derecognition of the tramp in the final scene signals how her gendered expectations are shattered in her encounter with the tramp. Before the final scene, the girl imagines her beloved to be a "Prince Charming"[69] figure, to be a gentleman and a protector who conforms to the norms of masculinity. However, the tramp does not compile to the standards of masculinity. Much of the tramp's actions in the film are coded as queer. The tramp has a strong homosocial relationship with his drunken millionaire friend. They go to a high-end restaurant together, they are constantly touching each other, as well as hugging and linking arms. At one point in the film, the millionaire kisses the tramp on the cheek. At another point, the tramp and the millionaire wake up in the same bed next to each other. Furthermore, the tramp's clumsy and unthreatening mannerisms do not conform to (hetero)gendered norms of masculinity. His lacks sexual prowess and his lack of sexual desire disrupts the girl's (hetero)gendered expectations of love. In the final scene of the film, the girl realizes that the tramp does not conform to the fantasy of masculinity that she has projected onto him. As a result, she recognizes the insufficiencies of reading her beloved through a (hetero)gendered structure and breaks with this structure. This break does not produce discontent in the girl. Instead, it allows her conception of love and of her beloved to move beyond a way of thinking about love that encloses it within (hetero)gendered categories. The (hetero)gendered limit of her love is removed, with the result that her love can affirm the tramp's mystery far more than it would be able to if it remained bound to this limit.

[69] ibid, 3

Figure 1: The penultimate shot of City Lights, where the girl takes the tramp's hand and brings it closer to her heart.

Figure 2: The final shot of City Lights, where the tramp smiles at the girl with unadulterated love.

As a result, through derecognition, the girl responds to the tramp's exposure with an open and affirmative love. Žižek neglects to mention that the penultimate shot of the film is the girl taking the tramp's hand and bringing it close to her heart. Before she brings his hand to her heart, she says "Yes, I can see now." Here, she does not only see the tramp in his exposed state but also that love is about affirming one's beloved in their exposure. What she sees is the tramp's unadulterated love for her. We can read her gesture of bringing the tramp's hand closer to her heart as a pronouncement of love and an acceptance on her end. When she sees the tramp, she also sees the limits of her initial image of the tramp. However, instead of rejecting the tramp, she pulls the tramp closer to her. In this way, the tramp's final look at the girl need not be read as a look of "dread."[70] What matters most for the tramp is that the girl can now see. The tramp's eyes light up,

[70] ibid, 4.

not from dread, but from unalloyed joy. He feels her touch, he feels her heartbeat, and his eyes soften with love. These minor gestures point to a more optimistic future between the girl and the tramp. In a film so much about love and selfless giving, it would be a bit cruel to imagine the girl rejecting the tramp because he is of a lower class. Instead, the minor gesture of the girl bringing the tramp's hand to her heart shows the ways she derecognizes him and affirms his otherness. As her fingers curl ever so slightly to wrap around the tramp's hand, we see that the girl is not pushing the tramp away, but leaning into him. The girl accepts the tramp for who he is; she is fine with the fact that the tramp is not who she imagined him to be. Her gentle smile indicates that she still loves him. The tramp can feel her soft acceptance emanating from her, and so, he responses with a smile.

In derecognition, we realize that the other is a complex human being who eludes our understanding. The point of derecognition is not to arrive at a view of the other that is closer to their "true self" (whatever this may be). On the surface, it may seem that every time we witness an other's exposure to us, our view of them more accurately reflects their "true self." However, what derecognition reveals is that the other's "true self" is always being deferred—there is no unchanging "true self." By making our understanding of the other more open, we affirm the other in whatever mode they exist right now. There is a way to read the closing scene in *City Lights* wherein the tramp reveals himself to the girl and the girl discovers the final "true" image of the tramp. In this view, the tramp no longer tries to hide the fact that he is not a rich gentleman, and he allows the girl to see him undisguised. However, what this interpretation of the concluding scene misses is that the tramp *actually* was rich for a period. The tramp had enough money to pay for the girl's eye surgery. Granted, a good chunk of the film is about the tramp trying to make money: the fact of the matter is that the eccentric millionaire who pampered the tramp allowed him to live "rich" for a few nights. The tramp could have continued to live rich, but he was wrongly arrested by the police, whom mistook him for being a robber. In this way, the tramp started the film as a tramp, became rich, and

then subsequently lost his riches (the classic rag-to-riches-to-rags story). The girl was not tricked into thinking that the tramp had money, because, technically, the tramp *did* have money. In the closing scene, the girl comes to realize that the tramp is *now* poor. She does not think that he was always poor; rather, she realizes that his identity as a rich gentleman was fleeting. (Here, we should be mindful of the fact that *City Lights* came out in 1931, when America was in the midst of the Great Depression and people's wealth was in constant flux.) At the end of the film, the tramp is vulnerable to the girl, revealing himself as a vagrant. He is still the same person: giving and loving. It is just that now he has no wealth to give. This is where derecognition comes into play. The girl, in realizing that the tramp is expressing another side of him—the poor side—has to choose whether or not to affirm him.

If the girl loves the tramp, she will try to defer her recognition of the tramp. She will relativize her self-conceived notion of any primary feature of the tramp (such as his imagined wealth). Her initial image of the tramp could be that he is, first, wealthy and, then, charitable. When she realizes that the tramp is actually poor, she can derecognize her image of the tramp by seeing the tramp as primarily charitable and by concluding that the tramp's wealth (or lack thereof) is insignificant. Derecognition is an attitude of not being attached to our own image of the other, such that if this image is shattered, we can still fully accept the other. What overrides our vision of the other's qualities, material situation, interests, and so forth, is our love for the other. The girl loves the tramp more than she loves the image of him in her mind. The tramp exposes himself to the girl, afraid of being rejected. However, the girl loves the tramp and full heartedly accepts him. Of course she "reads" the tramp to be a certain way, as we all must read others to be a certain way, but she can defer her understanding of the tramp, recognizing the limits of her fantasy and allowing her view of him to change as he discloses himself to her.

By reading the film under the assumption that the girl genuinely loves the tramp, we find that she is pushed to derecognize him insofar as she will want her love to persist despite a moment of radical exposure. Her love for the tramp may drive her to reinterpret her image of the tramp, such that she can continue desiring him.[71] She could, for instance, think it is even sweeter that the tramp gave what he did not have to grant her vision, understanding that the tramp's charity was even more precious than it would have been if he had in fact been wealthy; it was extraordinarily meaningful precisely because he had nothing. Fundamentally, the girl's love for the tramp resides beyond her (mis)recognition of him as a rich subject. Love exists not as an ideal, nor as an idealization, but is built ground up from affirming the other.

It is worth noting that derecognition does not occur merely in moments of epiphany, nor does it only occur in cases of mistaken identity (as is the case in *City Lights*). It happens on the level of the everyday all the time. Lovers are constantly discovering small new things about their beloved and restructuring their relationship such that their beloved can more freely express various parts of themselves. As well, derecognition does not only happen once in a love relation. It is not as if once the girl realizes that her beloved is a tramp that they now have a full understanding of each other. Instead, the girl and the tramp—like all of us—will continue to defer their construction of each other; they—like all of us—will constantly revise their framework for interpreting each other. The persistent demand to never stabilize our construction of the other insists that we—to return to Derrida's wording—retain "an affirmative desire towards the Other."[72] When it comes to the girl and the tramp, the girl arguably has an affirmative desire for her beloved in his totality. This means that she accepts the parts of him that elude her. In welcoming his otherness, she allows her image of

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[71] Of course, every time one derecognizes an other, the space of desire between the two changes. The girl could turn from erotically desiring the tramp to having an affectionate *philia* for the tramp. Nonetheless, the underlying love the girl has for the tramp would still persist, even if it took a different form.

[72] Jacques Derrida, "An interview with Jacques Derrida."

her beloved to be less rigid, less tied down to income status, more playful, and more mysterious. Generally speaking, the otherness of the other, the parts of the other we do not know, become the points by which our desire is enflamed. Love is an exposure to otherness, that is, to what is outside our knowledge of the world. Loves bursts forth from the unexpected and shattering encounter with an other.

In other words, love is not about revealing or grasping the other's true self but is instead caught in a process of constant communication between two people. I am exposed to your otherness, open to being surprised by you. In response to this surprise, love compels me and you to listen to each other. And in order to listen to each other, we need to communicate. Communication can reveal new things about you to me, prompting me to engage with you with deeper consideration. If communication only disclosed information we already knew, we would just stay silent. Instead, the inkling of genuine communication starts when you create holes in my image of you. In this sense, love is a way of "paying attention"[73] to you. It is being reactive and receptive to you. This receptive communication is not about you disclosing your unchanging true self to me, but about fashioning a space where we can speak freely with each other, expressing everything from transient feelings to deeply held beliefs. There is no unchanging true self to grasp, because that self constantly changes as it processes new experiences. What I am exposed to is not an understanding of your true self, but the recognition that the truth of you exceeds any understanding. To love is to dare to risk communicating. It is to dare to destabilize my image of you and to affirm this instability in order to welcome your mystery.

At the same time, love is not solely the experience of your mystery. On the one hand, I invite your difference by accepting that I cannot predict your behaviors. On the other hand, I experience a great pleasure when I share a sentiment with you, when I know that I am thinking the

[73] Jacques Derrida, "An interview with Jacques Derrida."

same thing as you are, when we are working in harmony with each other, when—in short—I am in sync with you. This is to say that love can be both an affirmation of otherness *and* an experience of unity with an other because of love's ability to hold within itself contradictions.[74] With love, the joys of being in sync and unified and of welcoming difference can exist together.

While Badiou may posit that the Two's truths are entirely distinct, by deferring my recognition of the other in love, I also defer my ability to assert that we are absolutely distinct. To claim that you are completely different from me would imply that I possess complete knowledge of you, which can never be the case. At the same time, the fact that you remain a mystery to me does not mean that I can never share anything with you. Indeed, even when you act in a way that is mysterious, you may nevertheless remain in sync with me. To suppose that your perspective in love is totally distinct from mine would suggest that I could draw borders around my perspective and your perspective, which, in turn, would limit you. In derecognizing you, I accept that you may act differently from me, but that you may also intersect with me. Whether you are different from me or similar to me, I affirm your mystery—I commit to affirming your mystery. Love can be about both unity and difference.[75] For this reason, even though I am interested in exploring love in terms of difference, I do not wish to erase those parts of love that gesture toward unity; I want to praise love's ability to respect difference without thereby diminishing love's other aspects, such as its ability to appreciate moments of harmony. This is because love allows for contradictions in our experience of it.

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[74] Nancy stresses that love is always double: "free and chained, spiritual and sensual, enlivening and mortal, lucid and blind, altruistic and *egoistic*" (Nancy, 86). For Nancy, love can contain contradictory notions within itself without collapsing in on those contradictions. The ability to have something and its opposite within it makes love a kind of universalism—it can include everything in it.

[75] In fact, insofar as love is able to hold contradictory claims in on itself, one could say that love invites X and not X into its practice. One does not need to choose between a thing and its opposite in love because in love, both these things can co-exist. Later on in this paper, I will think about love as inviting both narcissism and altruism in its formulation.

Whether love involves an affirmation of difference or a celebration of unity, it creates something external to the couple. As Badiou points out, love is a construction of a world between Two. In love, I see the world from the perspective of a "we." I share "my" perspective with "you." But I also know that my perspective of "you" is limited. As a result, I have a limited understanding of how I see "our" world. The world between lovers is never exhausted of its mystery because neither lover has a total picture of it. How could they, if they do not even have a total picture of each other? That said, though there is no complete picture of the world between lovers, we can nonetheless draw a picture of this world. This is what I endeavor to do in the next section of this text.

The *Mise-en-scene of Love:* The Existential World and the Ecological World

Just as I have reworked Badiou's concept of difference, I want to reconceptualize his overall theory of love by examining how the world affects love. I wish to expand Badiou's claim that the world of love is constructed by the Two by adding that the setting in which we love constructs our perception of the other. In this context, I want to propose the term *mise-en-scene* of love. The term is meant to suggest that love takes place in a world: while the world constructs love, love also constructs a world that reflects the specificity of the bond between the lovers. I derive the concept of a *mise-en-scene* from its use in film theory to gesture at how setting, space, and lighting are crucial in the context of love. I am focusing on the environmental aspects of the *mise-en-scene* as opposed to human aspects such as acting and costume design. The use of the term *mise-en-scene* allows me to develop a framework for love that can analyze its presence in film. This will further my theorization of love by thinking it in tandem with cinema. Additionally, this term grounds my descriptions of love by providing a lens through which to analyze it beyond the subjectivities of the two lovers. This

use of *mise-en-scene* is analogous to how I understand the term *world*, which differs from Badiou's conceptualization of the term.

Recall that Badiou refers to the world of love as "an existential project" that is built by Two human agents.[76] This existential world of love is a crossing between self and other, wherein the two people's perspectives intertwine to produce a unique subjectivity through difference. However, I break from this existential notion of the world to propose an ecologically grounded one. I note that the Two are not the only actors in love, but create an existential world between them *through* various ecological processes. Thus, I use the term *world* in a broad sense to encapsulate the environment (the soil, the trees, the clouds), temperature (the cold, the heat), natural forces (the wind, the rain, the snow), astronomical encounters (the twilight, the stars, the moon), and much more. This is to say that the world is the place in which we love; it is the ecological grounds within which, on top of which, and through which our bodies move. I emphasize that the world between the two lovers is not removed from environmental existence.

With that said, I am also aware that the social world of the Two has a major influence on love.[77] Therefore, three major worlds are at play in love: the existential world, the social world, and the ecological world. These three major worlds do not have clear boundaries between them: snow in Toronto is different from snow in Switzerland (insofar as both places have a culture-specific relationship with snow), and the way snow affects lovers relies on the social world they live in. The ecological is interconnected with the existential and the social. There is no need to prioritize the lovers' social or existential world over the ecological world or the ecological world over the social or

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[76] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 25.

[77] The word *Weltanschauung*, meaning worldview, emphasizes the connections between the existential and social world. One's *Weltanschauung* is, put briefly, how they view life. One's view of life includes everything from religious conviction, philosophical beliefs about the world, and paradigms to understand sociality. In this way, *Weltanschauung* concerns one's existential experience, but also, their understanding of how they relate to the social world. My analysis does not explore *Weltanschauung* more because I am focused on the ecological world.

existential world—all three worlds are important. However, for this project, I am focusing primarily on the ecological world that the lovers inhabit.[78] I am not closing off the ecological world from the social or existential world. Instead, I am fleshing out a way of thinking about the ecological world in relation to lovers because it has often been neglected in our thinking about love.

In the broadest sense, the *mise-en-scene* of love refers to the notion that love is not simply a one-way construction of a world between you and I, but that the world itself has agency in shaping our conception of love. Over time, the construction of the world for those in love shapes their love relationships in return.[79] How the (ecological) world constructs a love relationship is not readily apparent. What does the fact that Toronto is snowy have to do with my love relationships?[80] I make four central claims to explain the *mise-en-scene* of love.

The first claim I want to make about the *mise-en-scene* of love—a claim that Badiou's own articulation of the relationship between love and the world already suggests—is that the world allows the lovers to transcend their own individuality. Recall that for Badiou, the twilight represents a moment of going beyond one's own individuality to establish a view of the world from the perspective of the Two. For Badiou, the other I love colors my view of the twilight, allowing me to view the twilight from the perspective of difference. I agree with Badiou. However, I wish to put

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[78] Though I will not explicitly explore the sexuality, gender, race, and class of a lover, there are plenty of excellent work that examine the relationship between love and identity. See for example, bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992) [for love and race], bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004) [for love and gender], *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays*, ed. Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) [for love and sexuality], Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love*, (New York: Punctum Books, 2012) [for love and sexuality], Denis De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) [for love and culture], Michel Hardt and Leonard Schwartz, "A Conversation with Michael Hardt on the Politics of Love," *Interval(le)s* II.2-III.1 (Fall 2008/Winter 2009): 811-821 [for love and class], Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) [for love and class].

[79] The fact that the *mise-en-scene* of love occurs over time is significant. Love happens through a gradual process. Likewise, how the world affects love is a subtle and gradual accumulation of ecological affectivities.

[80] Although, to briefly respond to this question, it seems intuitive to me that we seek out others based on the weather. Nature affects how we act as agents in the world, and therefore, how we shape our relationships. A snowy day will enflame our desire to seek warmth in our beloved's arms. A field of flowers will soften our hearts and allow us to more easily express joy to our loved ones.

some pressure on Badiou's conceptualization by adding three more claims about the role played by the world in the context of love. My second claim about the *mise-en-scene* of love is that the world is not only an existential construction of the Two but also the very fabric that gives us access to the other. The world is our grounds for love. I will support this claim through an analysis of air in Irigaray's work. My third claim about the *mise-en-scene* of love is that the world colors my view of the other, revealing new aspects of the other. My final claim about the *mise-en-scene* of love is that the world colors my view of love itself, transforming the definition of love from an affirmation of the difference between self and other to an affirmation of the difference between self, other, and world. By including the world in my analysis of love, I am arguing for a strictly un-private Eros that includes the exploration of the world in love's conceptualization. More broadly, I chart out a theorization of love that comes from without. This is not to say that my project examines what is outside of love, but, instead, what is the out-side of love: what may initially seem external to love, but what is actually an outer side of love. This so-called exterior of love is a new side of love that we can conceptualize.

Given that I have already shown my first claim regarding the *mise-en-scene* of love through my exposition of Badiou's work, I will now look at my second claim. I will draw on Irigaray's work in order to provide a fuller articulation of this claim. In *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* Irigaray critiques a view of the world which renders the distance between self and other as an abyss that cannot be crossed.[81] Irigaray points out that, although there is an insurmountable difference between self and other, this does not mean the two are alienated from each other.[82] Kelly Oliver, reading

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[81] Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 23. Though the book is specifically about Heidegger, the way Irigaray writes it does not exclude other philosophers from her critique. In this way, the notion that the distance between self and other has "no passage" (Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 23) is a notion present in many other philosophers. In "The Look of Love," *Hypatia,* 16(3) (2001), Kelly Oliver uses Irigaray to argue that Sartre, Lacan, and Freud are thinkers who create an unbridgeable gap between self and other.

[82] Irigaray writes that we "are inseparable, though this is not to say that [we] are fused into indistinction." (Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 84). Though we are different, that does not mean we are isolated from each other. In

Irigaray, states: "recognition requires that we are two different beings, inaccessible to each other, and yet able to communicate because of what is between us."[83] In Oliver's analysis of Irigaray, we are always communicating with one another, despite the fact that we remain mysteries to each other. Additionally, Irigaray argues that we should not see communication as an attempt to convince the other to adopt our vision of the world or to use the other for our benefit.[84] Instead, communication consists of our mutual interaction with "what is between us." And, according to Irigaray, what is between us is "air." Irigaray writes: "Is not air the whole of our habitation as mortals? Is there a dwelling more vast, more spacious, or even more generally peaceful than that of air? Can man live elsewhere than in air? Neither in earth, nor in fire, nor in water is any habitation possible for him."[85] We are always breathing air, always interacting with the other through air. For Irigaray, air organizes the space between us and the other and structures our interactions with the other; air is what "connects and separates everything on earth."[86] Despite being Other to the other, we are still always touching the other, in part, through air.[87] There is no "we" without air. We need air to live.[88] Love, then, is not a pure encounter with the other, but an encounter with the other that is mediated through the air we both share.

Thus, for Irigaray, love is both an exposure to the other's otherness and to the elements.[89] Love choreographs itself between the self, the other, and the air that the two breathe. Air allows our

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fact, Irigaray goes so far to claim that if there truly was an unbridgeable gap between us, we would be dead: "No gap, breach, spacing, or distancing is possible…. Were there in these circumstances any such distance, any void, the living organism would die." (*Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 84). What Irigaray is gesturing at is that no matter who or where we are, we are always connected to each other through air. If there was a gap in air—something which is physically impossible—then we would collapse into nothingness.

[83] Kelly Oliver, "The Look of Love," *Hypatia,* 16(3) (2001): 63.

[84] Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 28-29.

[85] Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 8.

[86] Kelly Oliver, 67.

[87] Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 42.

[88] Or, as Irigaray writes, "to breathe also means to be." (*Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, 62).

[89] Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 76-77.

intimate sounds to travel to our beloved's ears. Air hears every private utterance we say to our beloved—the particles in the air vibrate alongside beating hearts and trembling bodies.[90] Through this shared breath, the self and the other affirm each other's differences. Yet this breath is not only between the self and the other; rather, this breath connects the self and the other to the entire atmosphere around them. This breath leads the Two into the world and into a conception of love grounded in navigating the shared world that the Two inhabit.

I adapt Irigaray's discussion of "air" to my analysis of the world in order to claim that every interaction with an other is mediated through the world. This adjustment is less a break from Irigaray than a continuation of her project. Her discussion of air in *Forgetting of Air* is part of an unfinished tetralogy that studied the elements of water, fire, earth, and air. In Irigaray's view, this fourfold of elements permeates our experience of the world. As she notes: "We still pass our daily lives in a universe that is composed and is known to be composed of four elements: air, water, fire, and earth. We are made up of these elements and we live in them. They determine, more or less freely, our attractions, our affects, our passions, our limits, our aspirations."[91] Although Irigaray acknowledges the importance of four different elements to human life, as we saw above, she nevertheless privileges air as the element that makes life—and therefore, presumably, love—possible for humans. Though the fourfold of water, earth, fire, and air are the phenomena that shape the world, it is air, in particular, that makes "habituation possible."[92] Before there can be fire, water, or earth, there needs to be air to create a space in which the other elements can exist.

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[90] Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 48. Irigaray writes about how the voice can only make sound through air. The voice is something which is both inside and core to us, but also, projected outside for the world (and our beloved) to hear. Our voice, that extremely personal trait about us can only exist through air. Put again, we need to speak to say "I love you," but we need air to speak.

[91] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 57.

[92] Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger,* 8.

Irigaray's vocabulary of the elements allows her to express the differences between how each element constitutes part of the world. Meanwhile, my study of the world between lovers only needs to argue the importance of ecological phenomena more broadly in our love relationships.[93] What I am studying is the ground of love, which I argue is the world, and not the ground of habituation, which Irigaray argues is the air. I am using the term *world* instead of *air* because the world, as I understand it, includes a broader array of phenomena than just air that facilitate love. Air surrounds us, but so does temperature, the ground, heat, wind, the sun, moisture, the electromagnetic pole, gravity, the tectonic plates (and their many micro movements), the stars, the snow, the wind, the clouds, and so forth. Air may make the wind or the clouds possible, but I am not examining what is the most important element in the construction of a world; instead, I am exploring how all worldly phenomena are entwined in our love relationships. In using the term *world* I do not limit my analysis to only air (or for that matter, any single one element); instead, I suggest the importance of all ecological elements and forces in sculpting love. In this way, I am not arguing against Irigaray; instead, I extend her vocabulary, focusing on the term *world* in order to read Irigaray against Badiou and further develop my own theory.

Crucial to my second claim about the *mise-en-scene* of love is the idea that the self and the other are both bodies embedded in the material world. An existential project of love needs to include the existence of bodies. Bodies breathe; they get cold and sweaty. Bodies react to external stimuli. They *need* external stimuli. Our bodies are not barriers against accessing the other; they are what makes access to the other possible. We do not encounter the other outside their body—we encounter the other as a body. The world, specifically the ecological world, is the very medium through which our bodies connect to one another. The ecological gives us the air which we as

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[93] Irigaray, of course, explores the subject of love in *Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*; however by studying love through the language of the world, I am able to formulate different conclusions than her study of love through the language of air. These conclusions do not contradict each other, but instead reveal different aspects to love.

bodies fashion into words. There is no pure grasping of a self or an other outside of their embeddedness in the world, because the world grounds the self and the other. We need the ecological world to exist as a *we*. The Two in love are two bodies. When they love as lovers, they are also subsisting as inhabitants in an ecology. In fact, a lover loves *as an inhabitant in an ecological world*. Without a *mise-en-scene*, there is no setting for love and there is no love.

In this context, it is worth considering how the *mise-en-scene* of love acts as an intervention into Badiou's discourse on love. Recall that for Badiou, love needs to be between Two because it is the truth between the Masculine and Feminine. I have already shown where my views regarding this issue diverge from those of Badiou: I do not see love as a phenomenon that takes place between two (hetero)gendered individuals. Because I have no attachment to Badiou's (hetero)gendered binary, I have no trouble conceptualizing that love takes place in the interstices of Three. I note that if love is a process of building a world between the self and the other, it is not actually grounded in a Two but rather a Three: the self, the other, and the world. Put again, the world makes a wound in our hearts just as much as a lover does.[94]

Though Badiou understands that we are always loving in a world, he does not spend much time exploring how the world actively shapes love. Badiou's valorization of the Two in love relegates the world to a supplemental position wherein the world only matters because it connects us to others. In fact, it is not just Badiou who overlooks the agency of the ecological world in his discussion of love. All of the authors I have referred to in this text (Badiou, Nancy, Žižek, Derrida, and to a lesser extent, Irigaray) focus largely on the interpersonal dimensions of love. These authors run the risk of overemphasizing love as a mode of paying attention to the other, thereby neglecting

[94] Similarly, the last two claims of the *mise-en-scene* of love break from Nancy, whom I have often used as intellectual scaffolding in this text. For Nancy, the "preoccupation for things—and not for others—that are in the world [for Heidegger]… does not exactly accede to the privileged position [of the other]." (103) For Nancy, the world matters because it gives us access to the other. Yet the other retains a "privileged position" over things in the world.

the world's agency in love. It is true that we need an other to love—an important bedrock of love is the psychic, ethical, and intersubjective relationship we have with the other—but we also need a world to frame our love. This is why I bring attention to the role that the environment plays in love. I want to think about how, in addition to being a channel for communication, the world vibrates between the lovers.[95] Thus, I add sedimentation to Badiou's account by claiming that the ecological elements of the world in which we love shape the existential world constructed between the Two. The world, after all, is the site where I meet the other. That is, the world is a crossing which allows me to touch the other and the other to touch me. At the same time, by crossing through the world, I let the ecological world mediate my relationship to the other, thereby introducing the world into the construction of love. From this perspective, the construction of the world of love is not just between a you and a me, but contains warm nights by the fire, gusty winds outside a cottage, and tides underneath the stars. When I love a person, my love is not only directed at that person but also turns to an orbital love for the ecological world within which I encounter that person.

In order to show how my next two claims about the *mise-en-scene* of love differ from Badiou's concept of love, it is helpful to reevaluate Badiou's twilight example. Doing so shows how the remaining two claims about the *mise-en-scene* of love diverge from his account of love.

To explain my third claim about the *mise-en-scene* of love, that is, about how the world colors my view of the other, I will start with the observation that the twilight appears to me as an astronomical event. In looking at the twilight, my eyes dilate to absorb the light that floods my pupils. The twilight is constantly affecting me as an ecological phenomenon. The dirt beneath us, the trees behind us, and the twilight overhead make up the environment where love takes place. I am a body always subject to my environment. Changes in temperature, weather, and location invariantly

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[95] As Jane Bennett would put in Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

affect my mood and disposition toward the other. As a result, the world colors my view of the other in so far as the environment forms my perception and my actions toward them. If I am staring at a twilight, I may feel more open to the other and more willing to listen to them. Meanwhile, if it is a stormy day and I and the other are trying to find shelter, I may not be in the proper disposition to listen to the other's intimate stories. In the case of the twilight, the twilight's glow may soften my heart and heighten the feeling of interconnectedness I have with someone. My eyes will literally be more open because the twilight's sparkle will cause my eyes to widen in wonderment. The environment does not disappear in the face of the other, but exists alongside the other, emphasizing their features. The world I constructed with the other is one with light—the image I have of the other is sculpted by the light in which I have encountered them.[96] In this way, the ecological world can bring me closer to the other (or, if the weather is bad, it might push us further apart). My perception of the other is shaped by the encounter we have underneath the twilight, filtered through the twilight's rays.

Just as the twilight changes how I perceive the other, it also changes how I act toward the other. The ecological world does not only change my passive perception of the other. This change in perception often spurs me to act differently in relation to the other. A space stirs feelings in me; these feelings influence how I act around the other. As a result, the ecological world ends up changing how the world between lovers is constructed because it changes how lovers act toward each other. The way I treat the other underneath a twilight is molded by how twilight inspires feelings of tenderness and jubilance in me. If twilight makes me more affectionate, there is a better

[96] We see an example of how important light is in love in that famous scene in *Vertigo* (1958) dir. Alfred Hitchcock, where Scottie (James Stewart) can only lose himself in love when Judy (Kim Novak) steps in a green light. Scottie tries to transform Judy into Madeleine (Kim Novak) by dressing her up and dying her hair to look more like Madeleine. But the final touch in Judy's transformation is dependent on the environment Scottie perceives Judy in. The green light becomes the sculpting force for Scottie's desire. When he embraces Judy, he needs to look around her to make sure the mise-en-scene corresponds to his fantasy.

chance that I may offer the other my coat if they are cold. My act of giving the other my coat shows my care for them, but this care is only legible *because* the environment is cold. In this way, the atmospheric coldness of the twilight scene becomes a site in which I can undertake a caring act in relation to the other. In being a body embedded in an environment, I must react to stimuli from that environment. My reacting to these stimuli is a reacting *with* the other—I react to the environment *with* consideration to the other. At the same time, I am also reacting to the other in the environment, which invariantly changes how I see this other. The environment may prompt me to act with consideration toward the other, thereby changing (subtly, but significantly over time) how this other and I see each other. Thus, the twilight shapes my image of the other and also how I act around this other. From here, it follows that the twilight also shapes my understanding of my relationship with this other. If my relationship with the other is shaped by how I act around them and how I perceive them, it follows that it will also shape my relationship with the other.

For Badiou, the other, due to being other, experiences the world differently from me. The matter is, however, more complicated than this: in viewing the world with the other, I begin to experience the world through them, and new aspects of the world reveal themselves to me (and to us). Love is a way of seeing the world in a new light. I expand Badiou's argument by claiming that the world allows me—allows everyone—to see love in a new light. It is reasonable to think that the new knowledge I gain of the world as a result of love may change my definition of love. Love is not a stable lens through which I view the world. My definition of love changes based on my experiences with the world when I am in love and with the person I love. Thus, the world which I see anew in love also ends up making my love anew. The twilight turns into a force that ends up shaping my subjecthood and my love.

The basis of my fourth claim about the *mise-en-scene* of love is thus that the world affects our definition of love. Our definition of love develops over the course of our lives based on our

encounters with our loved one. However, this definition is not only shaped by our loved one but also by how we interact with this loved one in an environment. Our concept of love does not emerge out of a pure encounter with an other. Such a pure encounter is impossible because our encounter with the other is always mediated by the world. The various experiences we have with other people in particular settings end up shaping our idea of what a relationship is.

One way to illustrate how the world is embedded in love is to understand the word "love" as a signifier that refers to a set of concepts, affects, social imperatives, memories, ethical imperatives, and so forth. When I think of "love," I think of the affects I consider as "loving affects," such as the feeling of tenderness for the other or the butterflies in my stomach I get in their presence.[97] As I live my life, some affects will become added to my idiosyncratic set of loving affects and others will be removed. My affective relationship with infatuation may become less important over time while the feeling of habitual gratitude may become central to my set of loving affects. What love signifies to me changes over time through my various encounters with my beloved in the world. To refer to love as an "affect" gestures to how embedded love is in the world. Love is not just located in our hearts, but in our touch, our skin, and even the mood of an environment.

Affects, unlike emotions, are not purely psychological states, but also physical states embedded in an environment. When we walk into a room, we can feel the affect; affects are not solely "personal" but shimmer in an atmosphere.[98] They depend on a body which reacts to outside stimuli from the environment. An environment has a mood, which is not to say that two lovers experience the same mood when they encounter each other in this environment. However, a given space's lighting, heating, moisture, height, presence (or absence) of other people or things, and so

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[97] I will also think of the ethical and social imperatives love impresses on me. Love tells me to listen, to care, to be vulnerable, but for this illustration I will only focus on the affects.

[98] Sara Ahmed writes at length about how affects float in the atmosphere in Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). Likewise, Teresa Brennan discusses the relationship between affects and a space in Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004).

on, result in a response in our body. These responses in the body react in tandem with the responses in our beloved's body. The different (or similar) affective reactions to the environment that the two feel structure the way they encounter each other. As a result, we end up interpreting our new affective states and incorporating them into our concept of love.

With this said, it should be reemphasized that our definition of love is not solely shaped by the material world. How we think of love is molded by various social factors. I do not want to depoliticize love. Developing a more critical definition of love requires a careful examination of the various harmful expectations regarding love that we inherit from dominant ideology. As a result, our definition of love greatly benefits from the ideas of others. For example, Badiou's account of love is useful because he refuses to reduce love to a pure encounter with the other qua other, divorced from the world we live in. There is a way of thinking of love, which Badiou resists, that renders love as some kind of pure encounter with another's soul. This kind of love valorizes the private couple over the Two's shared engagement with the world. In doing so, it limits love to a private affair, erasing its aesthetic, political, and scientific dimensions.[99] In contrast, Badiou's account of love allows us to break free from redacting love to being strictly private and to place love outside the private mutters of the couple.

Additionally, our definition of love is shaped by our individual history of our various encounters with loved ones in the world. For example, my definition of love differs from Badiou's notion of love as a "construction" of a world by the Two by emphasizing the idea that love amounts to an exploration of the world by the Two; central to my definition of love is an appraisal of its adventurous side. In love, I explore the world with a "you"—that is, I navigate and experience the

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[99] Henri Lefebvre advocates this more social love. Lefebvre wants to think of love outside of the private sphere and release it into the social world. In Lefebvre's ideal view of love, love will allow two people to "enter everyday life" *through* their "physiological, psychological, 'spiritual' relation[ship]," that is, social love will allow two people to "impregnate the other human relations (social activities, thought, etc.), which henceforth will be accomplished through them, but not without them." (Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. I,* trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1991), 156.)

world with you. This is the result of building a concept of love through an exploration of space. What I find important in life is being absorbed in the experiences of the day-to-day. In a sense, when I experience a day with the other, I find that this day is spent encountering the world together, experiencing the world *not* from a philosophical realization of a Twoness, but from an experience of the world *qua* world *with* the other (not *through* the other).

In looking at a twilight, I do not think about how I construct a world with my beloved. Instead, I explore the twilight. The way in which I explore a twilight with the other is different from how I explore it on my own. On my own, I explore a twilight by staring at it contemplatively, losing myself in it, or using it as a creative motor. In contrast, when I explore a twilight with a "you," I feel "you" disappear alongside me—we evaporate into the twilight, like two ghosts, absorbed in the experience. This is not only an existential evaporation, an evaporation where I forget myself, but instead, an evaporation in the material sense of the word—I feel myself in the air alongside you, I feel myself as linked with the wind and the light and the leaves, and I feel you alongside me in this environment. Of course, eventually we return back to ourselves, but the experience of having been absorbed in an environment *together* ends up shaping our conception of what it means to *be* together. Being together involves letting the world shape the other and the other shape the world. In this way, love opens us to openness. It is an openness not only to the otherness of the other but also to the entire world in shaping my "us" and my "me."

I should emphasize that I do not wish to replace Badiou's notion of constructing a world in his theory of love with the notion of exploring a world in love. These two notions are not necessarily mutually incompatible—our exploration of the world can be a form of constructing a world, and our construction of a world can be a way to explore the world. Rather, I wish to claim that love does not have a stable relationship with the world, but is always instead being transformed when the Two encounter the world. I have formed this conception of love based on my personal

experience of exploring the world with loved ones. "What do I think of love?," Roland Barthes asks, adding "being inside, I see it in existence, not in essence."[100] The world—both existential and ecological—ends up shaping our love. Our love is constantly being reinvented in the course of its existence: a theorization of love is always being molded by the day-to-day practice of love. It is not only that we must reinvent love, but also that we are always already reinventing love.

Every new loved one who touches our heart demands a new conception of love. Though I said that my experience of love is entangled with the exploration of the world, I must admit that my concept of love depends on—changes on the basis of—the specificity of the other whom I love. Generally, I value exploration in love, but I also reserve a hole in my thinking of love that becomes whole through the other's conception of love. I may have some loose principles about how I ought to act in the context of a love affair—principles such as listening, caring, and exploring. These principles keep me grounded when I am confronted by challenges, when my narcissism is trying to overtake the other. However, these principles are always subject to change based on the other and the setting. The other and I intertwine our divergent concepts of love, braiding them into a new understanding of love, and then let this understanding loose in the world, thereby allowing our mutual encounter with the world to change how we see our love.[101] We do not only construct a world from the point of view of difference[102]—we also construct a love from the point of view of difference. My personal ideal of love does not take precedent over the conception of love that I build together with my beloved: our ideals intertwine to generate a new vision that I would not have been able to arrive at on my own. This process of building a Two creates something entirely new, something unique outside of all of our past loves. This new vision does not come about easily; there

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100 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse,* 59.

101 This is not to say that we "unify" our definitions of love—we may both have separate definitions of love. Instead, we dare to navigate the world with these two definitions of love simultaneously, without trying to assimilate one to the other.

102 Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 25.

will be points where our ideas of love collide and our ideals wound each other. These collisions will be amplified in the different ways we interact with the world. Our conflicting beliefs of love may be compounded by the heat of the sun. However, we hope to heal from these wounds, synergize our ideas, and come closer to a genre of a world that beckons us to persist in our love.

Our new love is created through our day-to-day encounter with the world. Moreover, our love is renegotiated as we continue to interact with the world together. We do not stick to the definition of love that we had at the start of our relationship, but let our concept of love change as we encounter the world day-by-day. Love is not just a matter of constructing a world from the perspective of the Two, as it is for Badiou. Rather, it is a matter of being *continuously* constructed anew in the interstices of everyday life. The litter of words, touches, glances, smiles, and frowns; the long intimate conversations and the brief mundane ones; the small shifts in desire that occur during the day, and the large change in beliefs that occur in our lives. All of this makes our love "ours." There is no stable ideal of love. Love is always a work in process that forms as the Two continue to live life together. How is this love constructed except through the Two's interactions with the world?

The *Mise-en-scene* of Love in *Meet Me in St. Louis*

Before closing this essay, I would like to discuss a filmic example of the *mise-en-scene* of love. I will use *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), directed by Vincente Minnelli, as my example.[103] Analyzing this film allows me to illustrate the second and fourth claims I have made about the *mise-en-scene* of love:

[103] In the past, I have analyzed the *mise-en-scene* of love in Eddy Wang, "Projections of Eros, The Bittersweet: Reflections on Love, Ghosts and Cinema" (presentation, 23rd Annual Film Studies Association of Canada Graduate Colloquium, Toronto, Canada, January 31, 2021). Likewise, I asked Laura Mulvey to talk about the *mise-en-scene* of love in *Vertigo* (1958) in Laura Mulvey, "The Metaphor of the Beautiful Automaton Reanimated: Artifice, Illusion, and Late Style in *Vertigo*" (presentation, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, April 8, 2021) and she analyzed how the romance between Scottie (James Stewart) and Madeleine (Kim Novak) developed through their relationships with the mise-en-scene.

the film demonstrates how the ecological world is the ground for love and how the environment shapes our conceptions of love.

The major conflict in *Meet Me in St. Louis* is that Mr. Alonzo Smith (Leon Ames) plans to uproot his family from their idyllic home in St. Louis to move to New York City because his law office promotes him. The Smith family is devastated that they will have to move, but Alonzo only has the best intentions. Being the sole breadwinner of the family, he is thinking of how he can best support his family of eight and send his daughter Rose Smith (Lucille Bremer) to college the following year. Although the Smith family eventually comes to peace with the fact that they are moving to New York, it is a sore spot for them throughout the film. Structurally, the film charts out a year in the life of the Smith family in St. Louis. The movie is just as much about what it means to live in St. Louis as it is about what it means to be a family. Life in the city is celebrated through traditions such as the St. Louis Halloween tradition of throwing flour at old grouchy members of the community as well as through the repeated musical motif of the song "Meet Me in St. Louis, Louis," which is sung three times. St. Louis becomes the main love interest of the film. In fact, it is the fixation with St. Louis that permeates the movie that illustrates just how important a *mise-en-scene* is to love. St. Louis is so paramount to how the members of the Smith family love each other that it becomes an object of their love. The Smith family's recognition of the significance of the environment in their love for each other results in their intense love for St. Louis. Although my prior explication of the *mise-en-scene* of love does not describe how the environment itself can become a beloved figure, my analysis of *Meet Me in St. Louis* further develops my theory as opposed to merely reflecting it. Bringing my claims about the *mise-en-scene* of love from the realm of abstract theory into concrete film analysis will inevitably make new theoretical claims. In addition to illustrating my second and fourth claims regarding the *mise-en-scene* of love, my analysis of *Meet Me in St. Louis* also reveals how the environment of love does not always exist merely in the background of

a love affair; the film shows that instead of merely being an obscure backdrop to love, the environment itself can be a beloved figure.[104] In *Meet Me in St. Louis*, the third term of love, the world, does not lie dormant in the lovers' unconscious but is consciously celebrated and incorporated into the intersubjectivity of the Smith family. As a result, *Meet Me in St. Louis* is a generative film to analyze when it comes to understanding the role of the world in the context of love because it emphasizes how important St. Louis is in the love that the members of the Smith family feel for each other.

In fact, the emotional climax of the film occurs when the Smith family's youngest child, Tootie Smith (Margaret O'Brien), runs out in the middle of the night during Christmas to destroy the snowmen that the family has built because she does not want to leave St. Louis. Under the conventions of a Hollywood romance, we would expect the emotional apex to occur when John Truitt (Tom Drake) proposes to Esther Smith (Judy Garland). However, this scene is, emotionally speaking, relatively muted, contrasting the Hollywood convention which dictates that the kiss or declaration of love that the audience has been waiting for be filled with pathos. Instead, the climax occurs when Tootie is unable to accept that the family will leave behind their world in St. Louis in three days' time and reacts to this loss of a world with destructiveness and intense crying.

After having a conversation about moving with Esther, her second-oldest sister, Tootie realizes that she will not be able to build snowmen in New York, where they will not even have a backyard because it is . . . well, New York. Tootie transfers her frustrations on the snowmen she cannot carry with her. St. Louis is an environment that gives the Smith family a backyard in which to create snowmen and, generally speaking, to bond as a family. In this way, *Meet Me in St. Louis*

[104]The film also shows the porous boundaries between the social and ecological world. The ecological phenomena that occur in St. Louis are so integrated into the social-urban world of St. Louis that the city becomes an ecological space where St. Louis sociality is mediated by ecology (and conversely, the experience of nature is mediated by the social world of the city).

showcases my second claim about the *mise-en-scene* of love, namely that the world creates the very grounds for love. The setting of St. Louis opens a set of signifiers that allow the members of the Smith family to love each other. St. Louis as a *mise-en-scene* with its beautiful green and red color palette gives the family fairs, dances, starry nights, snowball fights, and a big yard which facilitates their ability to love each other. Tootie understands that St. Louis makes it possible for her to love her family and to feel their love for her. Esther tries to comfort her by saying, "We're all going to be together, just like we've always been. That's what really counts." But even she does not fully believe this—she herself is crying as she hugs Tootie outside in the dark. Tootie does not think that all that matters is her family being together, because she believes that the matter of St. Louis matters in making the family stick together. In this way, St. Louis is "what is between" the Smith family:[105] it is the grounds upon which they love each other. The members of the Smith family will of course have a relationship with each other in New York, but "what is between" them in St. Louis will be lost; their family dynamic will be forever changed. The way in which the members of the Smith family understand their family dynamic and their relationships with each other is filtered through their bodies being embedded in St. Louis. Part of the horror of moving to New York is that the Smith's family's bodies are not accustomed to moving in the tight spaces of a congested, hectic urban landscape. In response to Alonzo's declaration that the family is moving to New York, Rose decries that "people like us live in flats, hundreds of flats in one building." The space—and spaciousness—of St. Louis is so crucial to how the members of the Smith family are embodied in their day-to-day life that moving to a cramped New York flat would end up disembodying them, troubling their family dynamic, which allows them to love each other through their open exploration of space. Tootie cannot even imagine what life would be like in New York because the way she loves her family is fundamentally tied to the way that her body moves in St. Louis.

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[105] Kelly Oliver, 63.

Of course, if the Smith family moved to New York, they would not stop loving each other as a family. However, they would have to relearn heir concept of love. It is here that we see my fourth claim about the *mise-en-scene* of love in play, namely that love as a concept is built through a day-to-day encounter with the world. Part of Tootie's horror, and part of why she has a meltdown with the snowmen, is that she realizes that once she is in New York, she will lose her current concept of love. Tootie is a child who loves primarily through playing in the ample space that her family occupies in St. Louis—rather than, say, through intimate conversations with the members of her family—which means that her entire language of love would be thrown out the window if the family were to relocate. Her concept of love, having been formed entirely in St. Louis until this point, signals how crucial St. Louis has been for the development of the Smith family's love. The Smith family, as much as it is a collection of individuals who love and support each other, is also in a love relation with St. Louis. St. Louis as a place is treated as a lover (a good chunk of the dialogue concerns the Smith family getting excited for the 1904 World's Fair) and it is the place where familial love flourishes. The members of the Smith family have created a life and a world in St. Louis. Tootie can only envision love in St. Louis. Her meltdown pertains both to leaving St. Louis and to losing her concept of love. Perhaps Tootie realizes that she can rebuild a new concept of love, or perhaps she does not. Either way, the trauma of losing her current language of love is immense for her. Love as a concept that is built day-to-day would have to be rebuilt in New York. Tootie, as a child who has not yet experienced uprooting, is afraid of this process of rebuilding. One of the first things Anna Smith (Mary Astor)—Tootie's mother—says to Alfonso after he breaks the news about moving to New York is a series of "what" questions: "And what will the children do?" "What friends?" and so on. Anna, speaking on behalf of her children, understands that the "what" of their existence and their love will need reinventing. Generally speaking, I want to propose that leaving one's *mise-en-scene* of love without proper psychic preparation to reinvent love in a new place can

become a site of trauma and result in a breakdown. Just as leaving behind a lover can scar one's heart, leaving behind the world in which one loves can be wounding.

Alonzo, as he watches Tootie undergo her meltdown, comes to realize that he cannot move his family from St. Louis in part because St. Louis has become a part of their family. Thus, the film ends, following the classical conventions of a happy ending, with the decision that they will stay in St. Louis "until they all become rotten." A standard expectation for a comedy is that the plot culminates in a marriage. In contrast, *Meeting in St. Louis* ends with the Smith family attending the long-awaited World's Fair. This event becomes, in a way, the metaphorical marriage of the Smith family with St. Louis.

In sum, in this section about the *mise-en-scene* of love, I have attempted to show that love is alive in the environment itself. Love is more than the construction of an existential world between the Two, more than the world of shared intersubjective moments and memories. Love is also where the lovers encounter the ecological world. This ecological world consists of environmental forces that shape our lives, of the air we share between our breathes, of the snowmen we build during the winter, of the various settings we explore together, of felt affects that are not yet known to be felt, and of earthly phenomena that brush up against the surface of our skin. This ecological twin of the world is always there in the sky of the existential world of love, whether we are aware of it or not. When we spend the day with our beloved, we also spend the day with the world. In fact, my encounter with the world is made up of the small details of the day that structure me and my beloved's time together. As the twilight turns into night, we bring our environmental embeddedness into bed. When we kiss our beloved good night, we also kiss the twilight good-bye.

Coda:

This essay has reevaluated Badiou's theory of love by offering an alternative way of conceptualizing difference and the world in the context of love. The notion of derecognition allowed us to rethink difference by highlighting how our understanding of an other is always limited, and that we should leave our view of the other open to affirm their mystery. My reading of *City Lights* further developed the notion of derecognition by arguing that in the film's final scene, the girl derecognizes the tramp in a gesture of love. In a similar vein, I developed an alternative mode of thinking about the world between lovers through the concept of the *mise-en-scene* of love. The *mise-en-scene* of love reveals the ways the world makes it possible for us to love. It asserts that there are three major terms in love: the self, the other, and the world they love in. Moreover, studying the *mise-en-scene* of love shows that our conceptions of our beloved and of love itself are shaped by the world.

My essay presented four claims about the *mise-en-scene* of love and further grounded its analysis of this *mise-en-scene* of love through a reading of *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Overall, both derecognition and the *mise-en-scene* of love are rooted in the idea that we cannot circumscribe our understanding of the other in love, nor circumscribe love to solely being about the other without considering the agency of the world between lovers. Love is always opening up to new possibilities from the other and from the world. It is the process of affirming each other's otherness while exploring the world together. In love, we discover the impossibility of having a stable conception of one another as well as the necessity of the world in making "us" possible. All in all, this text presented a theory of love that argued that difference is always being negotiated, that our conception of the other is always shifting, and that while we construct the world, the world simultaneously constructs us.

This essay concludes with three codas. Each coda explores one of the major terms concerning love that I have introduced. The first coda is written from the perspective of the "I," the

second from the perspective of the "world"— though not the ecological world already fleshed out in my study of the *mise-en-scene* of love, but the world constructed through everyday experience—and the third from the perspective of "you." These codas are not fully explicated arguments like the rest of the essay, but brief musings that end this text in a lyrical manner. The first coda examines the issue of whether it is possible to write about love from a self-centered perspective. The second coda explores love as an embodied phenomenon enmeshed with everyday life, taking up strands of thought that have been haunting this text. The final coda is a series of questions that the perspective of "you" asks of the text and of love itself, revealing how our reality of love emerges through questions we ask of it and of our beloved.

Coda 1: Narcissism: or How can "One" Write Love? ("the I")

How do I write about love? Writing, as a solitary activity, precludes the other in its production. The other never speaks for themself when I write about them. I only describe the other through my image of them. (*What is the point of writing so much about love? Why have I spent so much time on this topic?*) How, can I write love while being with love? Can the act of writing be loving? (*What is the difference between a love letter and a theory of love? This is not a love letter, so what is it?*) Writing about love seems to clash with Badiou's idea that love is a construction of the world from the point of view of difference. I write my theory of love based on my point of view. Would writing about love be just another attempt to subsume the other into my worldview? (*I feel the need to write. But I do not understand the purpose. Is it only to feed the need?*) I write to a "you," or I write as a "we," but in the end, "I" am the one who writes.

Badiou calls my identity "the enemy" of love.[106] For Badiou, love is about the self going "beyond himself, beyond the narcissistic."[107] He is part of a tradition of thinkers who define love as

[106] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 60.
[107] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, 19.

"the extreme movement, beyond the self, of a being reaching completion."[108] (*Sometimes I ask myself what all this giving myself up accomplishes. I know love does not need to accomplish anything, but still . . .*) This tradition of selfless love is everywhere in Western culture—whether it is the love of laying down oneself for another (John 15:13 writes "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."[109]) or of losing oneself in a bout of passion (such as in *Tristan and Iseult* or *Romeo and Juliet*). (*I was taught that selfless care was the highest value in life. That love was putting someone before you. I never learned where my "I" fit into love, other than as a conduit to listen to a "you."*) Nancy describes this selfless love as "the suppression of self in love, and the correlative suppression of the self for love," adding that this is love's "ultimate truth and [its] ultimate effectivity."[110] The ultimate truth of selfless love is conquering our individual narcissism for the sake of the other.

Yet, for there to be a Two, there first needs to be a one. For one to be exposed to the other, there must be a self that can be exposed. (*I never learned how "I" could experience the world. I relied on "you" to tell me what "we" were experiencing. But "I" was not in touch with my own experience. I focused on your experience. An encounter with "you" was positive if you felt it was positive. Because your joy determined "our" joy.*) Nancy points out that if "love is the gift of the self, it would thus also be, dialectically, the appropriation of the self. Self love would therefore be at the heart of love."[111] In being selfless, in giving the self up, I end up affirming myself even more. The more selfless one is, the better one feels about oneself. (*When I was a child I was told time and time again that it was better to give than to receive.*) Irigaray explains how the act of affirming an other pushes me to affirm myself. (*I have become divided. There is an "I" who loves, who cares, who pays attention, and then there is a selfish I which experiences.*) She writes, "I will never reach this other, and for that very reason, *he/she* forces me to remain in my self in order

[108] Jean-Luc Nancy, 86.
[109] John 15:13 ESV.
[110] Jean-Luc Nancy, 86.
[111] Jean-Luc Nancy, 95.

to be faithful to *him/her* and us, retaining our difference."[112] (*But the "I" which takes pleasure from experiencing the world exists in a separate realm from the loving I. "I" am not really there in love, I am disembodied in love, floating outside my self by something always focused on constructing an "us."*) For Irigaray, I cannot overcome my self because I need my "me" to retain my difference from the other. In retaining my difference, I establish the bedrock that allows me to love the other.

Derrida writes, "narcissism is the elementary condition for love."[113] (*When I first read Derrida claim that, I was taken aback. The word narcissism had such bad feelings attached to it growing up. It still does.*) Akiria Lippit reads Derrida's claim on narcissistic love through Freud to assert that love starts from the self and travels outwards to the other. Following Freud, he points out that there are two forms of narcissism we are bound to: primary narcissism and secondary narcissism. (*But Derrida's direct phrasing made me realize how attached I was with a concept of selfless love, and how, it often made me resent love, because it made me feel like I was just giving my capacity to experience away.*) Primary narcissism posits that infants experience the world through their autoerotic instincts before their ego develops. For an infant, "In the auto-erotic sea of primary narcissism, I take *me* for *you,* and experience me as you, and vice versa."[114] (*We explore the world, but I did not ever get to experience that world. I could never "take me for you, and experience me as you"*[115] *because I did not learn how to experience.*) Then the ego develops, and the infant gains a sense that there is a world apart from them that is between them and the instantaneous fulfillment of their desires. (*I spend my days with the people I love, but I do not feel all that real. I was never taught how to feel real with other people.*) The ego breaks the unity between *me* and *you* by making me navigate the world that separates me from you. Still, through secondary narcissism, I can reach you

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[112] Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History,* 105.
[113] Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say…., trans.* Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 115.
[114] Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Cinema without Reflection: Jacques Derrida's Echopoiesis and Narcissim Adrift,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 46.
[115] Akira Mizuta Lippit, 46.

again. In Lippit's analysis, secondary narcissism moves me away from the world in order to create an island of myself away from that world.[116] (*But when I wake up tomorrow, I know I will feel real, and I will feel grateful to all those in my life. I wonder how much of what I write is true and how much of it is over dramatization?*) This sounds solipsistic until we realize that in separating from the world in secondary narcissism, I also bring a group of people I love with me to my island.[117] (*I do not know how true I think the theory of primary and secondary narcissism is. But I still included it in this text. I could not part with Freud. Nor with Derrida, Badiou, or Nancy. Many times I wanted to, but they hold too much sway on my island to separate from them. They are the only way I can express myself without feeling self-serving.*) The act of separating from the world to make my own island creates the possibility of creating an isle of islands with my loved ones. (*I could not part with you.*) There is an implicit tension between Lippit's formulation and theological and humanist concepts of universal love: one cannot love all of the world because love is about separating from the world with an island of those one cares about. (*As a child I had dreams of world peace. When did I stop? These days I wonder less of world peace and ask myself what my place is in this world.*) Significantly, Lippit claims that the foundation of the self is the other and that the grounds of the other is the self. In this way, love is narcissistic because one cannot love another without a self.[118] However, love is an open narcissism that invites you to my self, onto my island. I construct a world with you by splitting off from the world to create an island. This island, which contains me, you, and all the moments we have shared together, becomes "our world." *(I wonder how much of what I write about love is my dream of what I hope love can be as opposed to what love actually is.)* Every time I think of you or spent time with you, we visit our island, our world together, and we continually section off pieces from the larger world in order to add to our world.

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116 Akira Mizuta Lippit, 48.
117 Akira Mizuta Lippit, 63.
118 Akira Mizuta Lippit, 60.

Coda 2: Departures—Encounters and Everyday Events ("the World")

I invite you to create a world with me. But now what? Do we have a theory of love that allows us to live in that world?

Badiou describes love as an encounter. He writes, "love always starts with an encounter. And I would give this encounter the quasi-metaphysical status of an *event,* namely something that doesn't enter into the immediate order of things."[119] For Badiou, love is the event of two perspectives colliding to create a new perspective from difference.[120] Badiou points out that love disrupts our regular life and cannot be put into the "immediate order of things."[121] For Badiou, love is a fall that shatters us and disfigures our expected life plans.[122]

But what do other thinkers say? You have spent much of this text reevaluating Badiou, so why not look at other theorists of love?

For Nancy, love is a wound and a break. Nancy characterizes love as a state of exposing and being exposed[123] wherein my "I" is brought to the other and to the outside. He writes, "the love break simply means this: that I can no longer, whatever presence to myself I may maintain or that sustains me, pro-pose myself to myself . . . without remains, without something of me*, remaining,* outside of me."[124] To love is to be constantly exposed to another. He later specifies that love "*is* this outside . . . each time singular, a blade thrust in me, and that I do not rejoin,"[125] this is love. Love is the act of bringing my "I" outside of myself. Love causes me to break from myself as a self-

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[119] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 28.
[120] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 29.
[121] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 28.
[122] Of course, Badiou does not limit love to solely being an event. Badiou contends that "love cannot be reduced to the first encounter, because it is a construction." (Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 31). He further adds that the "enigma in thinking about love is the duration of time necessary for it to flourish. In fact, it isn't the ecstasy of those beginnings that is remarkable. The latter are clearly ecstatic, but love is above all a construction that lasts." (Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 32).
[123] Jean-Luc Nancy, 89.
[124] Jean-Luc Nancy, 97.
[125] ibid, 97.

contained unity to exist in the outside world with an other. In love I am shattered by the outside and my remains are scattered outside of me. The break/event of love is the moment I no longer remain inside myself: my "I" and my "life" become disrupted and thrown outside of me. Therefore, for both Badiou and Nancy, the event of love propels us to move outside of ourselves and to create a world together.

But what are the other perspectives to love? Must love always be understood as an event? Does thinking about love as an event allow us to live in the world as lovers?

Though thinking about love as an event generates a valuable perspective on love, it is not the only way to frame love. Love may not "immediately enter into the order of things,"[126] but it eventually becomes integrated into our everyday world. Before I love an other, they may be a stranger or an acquaintance in my life, but once I love a person, I start structuring my life around that person. The people I love become part of my ordinary existence. As a result, I argue that viewing love from the perspective of everyday experience reveals new ways of understanding love.

Are the two perspectives—love as an event and love as an everyday occurrence—at odds with each other?

Not at all. We cannot split off the *event of love* from *after the event* of love. For Badiou, the project of love entails being faithful to the event of love by constantly reaffirming one's love *after the event*.[127] I posit that there is no *after the event* because the event is repeated in every encounter we have with an other. I do not want to think of love such a way that I elevate it to an unknown Heaven that only occurs once, but to think of love as happening in our world every day. For example, though the phrase "I love you" holds significance in its first utterance, every utterance afterwards also holds significance. In fact, a subsequent utterance is sometimes more impactful than the initial utterance. In other words, I claim that love, in being integrated into our daily lives, still exists as a disruption to

[126] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 28.
[127] Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love,* 44.

our lives. The disruption of the first encounter reoccurs in every subsequent encounter by virtue of love's existence as a state of openness and exposure that bars us from having a predictable and closed off life.

Nancy writes that, in love "one would want to deal only with a moment of contact between beings, a light, cutting and delicious moment of contact, at once eternal and fleeting"[128]; however, what one finds is that "the rendezvous, our rendezvous with love, takes place not once, but an indefinite number of times."[129] Love is a process of incessant exposure: "it happens, and it happens *endlessly*."[130] In this way, it is not the case that the encounter becomes an event but rather that the movement of love, its day-to-day shattering, takes on the status of an event. Love is not localized in a singular event or encounter; it is always happening.[131] Love is constantly passing through me, you, and the world as a movement of emotions, capturing all the different feelings we have toward each other (affection, joy, sadness, empathy, frustration, and etc.). To be exposed means to let the other cross into our heart and open up something in us in that movement.

But if the event of love is happening every day, is it really an event anymore?

Perhaps not. But does it matter? Why write about love as an event? What does this accomplish if it does not correspond with our day-to-day experience of love? Love's disruptive wounding is always happening; it cannot be restricted to a single encounter. The heart of love cannot be reduced to or understood as an isolated moment. Though love wounds us, the wound that it creates does not close the next morning. The wound continues to expose us; that initial wounding that we call the event persists in the open wound of everyday existence. Every new day

[128] ibid, 92.
[129] ibid, 93.
[130] ibid, 97. My emphasis on "endlessly."
[131] ibid, 98.

spent with our love is another day naked to love. We are not only wounded but also must embody that wound the next day (and every day after).

(But simultaneously, focusing on how love ends up disrupting and wounding a subject neglects love's *joie de vivre*. Certainly, there is pain in love, but the everyday experience of love [when it goes right] is joyful. To limit the heart of love to a heart that is only punctured, exposed, pinned, left bleeding, and dead is to diminish the heart's plentitude. This returns us to the dilemma of how we write about love. By writing down my wounds, will my theory of love become more riddled with wounds? *What is the line between writing as a wounded subject and writing on the subject of wounds?*[132] At what point does a fixation on the wounds of a subject worsen the heart's bleeding?)

Are you afraid of theorizing a dead love? Do you think seeing love as an event renders it dead?

I do not want to suggest that seeing love as an event and seeing love as an everyday practice are at odds with each other. But I want to avoid framing love in a way that divorces the theory of love from its everyday practice. The event of love describes the way it disrupts our lives, while the magic of love occurs when it is embodied in our lives, when we have incorporated our mutual care for each other into our day-to-day practice, and when we can create a crossing from you to me and from me to you.

So what do you aim to do when you write about love?

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[132] I am inspired by Anne Anlin Cheng's discussion on the difficulties of speaking about racial melancholia in *The Melancholy of Race*. She writes, "It may appear tremendously difficult to talk about the "melancholia" of racialized peoples, especially since it seems to reinscribe a whole history of affliction or run the risk of naturalizing that pain…. In short, it can be damaging to say how damaging racism has been" (Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 14). Similarly, there are potential dangers in characterizing love as a wound. It can be wounding to say how wounding love can be, and it can make love's wound worse. Additionally, although the wound of love does not seem to be as connected to race as racial melancholia is, we must remember that many experiences of wounded love are due to one's identity. In talking about a wounded love, do we risk naturalizing a violent history of love's wounding? That is, do we risk making it seem as if love is "supposed" to be wounding, when in actuality, it is often wounding for contingent systematic reasons?

If I conceptualized love in such a way as to make it appear outside of my everyday embodiment, I would be thinking about a love not lived. But my writing on love aims to keep love alive in my thinking, which means letting my love think. I recognize that thinking love in its day-to-day embodiments through writing reveals its limitations from the outset: "to write" is different from "to embody." But different does not mean totally disjunct: I embody love in writing, and in embodying love, I am given things to write. In the end, I want the heart of my theory of love to keep beating, to remain alive in the day-to-day.

But what does it mean for you that love be alive?

Coda 3: "You"

Who are "you"? "You" are always changing—so how do I write to "you"? Before "you" was another "you." That "you" is dead. And one day "you" will be dead. Whose "you" will be "you" then? And if "you" die, will this theory of love be dead too? And what is the difference between loving you as you change and loving change? And what is the difference between doing something out of love and being in love? And is being out of love still a form of being in love? What is so important about being in love? And what is more important than living life with Love? What is the difference between love and Love? Does love need to be between these two binaries? What happens if you exhaust love? Can you get tired of love? Do you have to give yourself up in love? Who decided that? Does love demand that we give up our concept on love too? Where does all this giving go? To you? Does love need fidelity? And does love need to start with an event? Or could we do away with the beginning all together? And could we do away with love's relationship with truth? And why does it have to be a worthwhile pursuit? Why do we need to find some grand transcendence with love? Why do we value love in the first place? And how do we value it? And does our current way of thinking about love prevent us from embodying it?

What if we stopped asking love if it is "right" or "true" or "important" or "what the ethics of care are" or "what desire is" and started asking: What should we do today? What should we make for dinner? Do we want to go for a walk or take a nap? Should I do my work before or after the walk? Do we want dessert after the soup we had for brunch today? And is a lover's diet more important than their philosophy? Does love need to reach beyond a satisfying lunch? And is love about changing the world or about learning to be grateful for the world as it is? Does love need to be between these two binaries? And does it need to transform our routines or be transformed by them? And is love different in the morning than in the evening? And if love is about spending the day with "you," does that mean that "you" are no longer a single "you" but the many "yous" who all walk in and out of my life? Is love of all or of one? Does love need to be between these two binaries? And is love the word for those with whom you eat? And if we do not eat, will we die? What does love want to eat? Is love thirsty too? How long can love spend thinking before it dehydrates itself? Is love thinking with feeling or feeling with thinking? Does love rewire your mind? Is love kind? What kind of kind is love?

Does love only exist without possession? Or is there love with possession? And do you think about us? How often do you think about us? Why does it matter if you do or do not? Is love afraid of being left alone? Has anyone loved without being anxious? Has anyone loved without hating? Has anyone loved without thinking that they wanted to be alone? Has anyone loved and wondered what they would do if they were alone, and then, thinking about it, realized that they would much rather love? And must we be present in love? Must love always have a future? And is the construction of a world in love about the constructing or the object that is constructed? And must love exist without idealization? How do we decide what enflames desire and what diminishes it? And why do some wounds make the heart stronger while others cause it to collapse? And why are the special moments of love valued over the insignificant ones? And how is love founded in both the pockets of the day

and the hopes of the year? And is there such thing as an impatient love? Is there such a thing as an unkind love? And what happens if you overanalyze love? What happens to "you" in analysis? And is talking about love inexhaustible? And how many more questions can you ask of it? How many more questions can you ask? And when do you know to listen? And when do you know to talk? And when do you know to stop? Why do you want to stop? Where do you want to stop? Are you getting hungry? We can stop here? It is a nice spot, under the shade. But we should not stop for too long, or we will never reach the summit before twilight.

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