

IDILIOS

MARTA SOUL









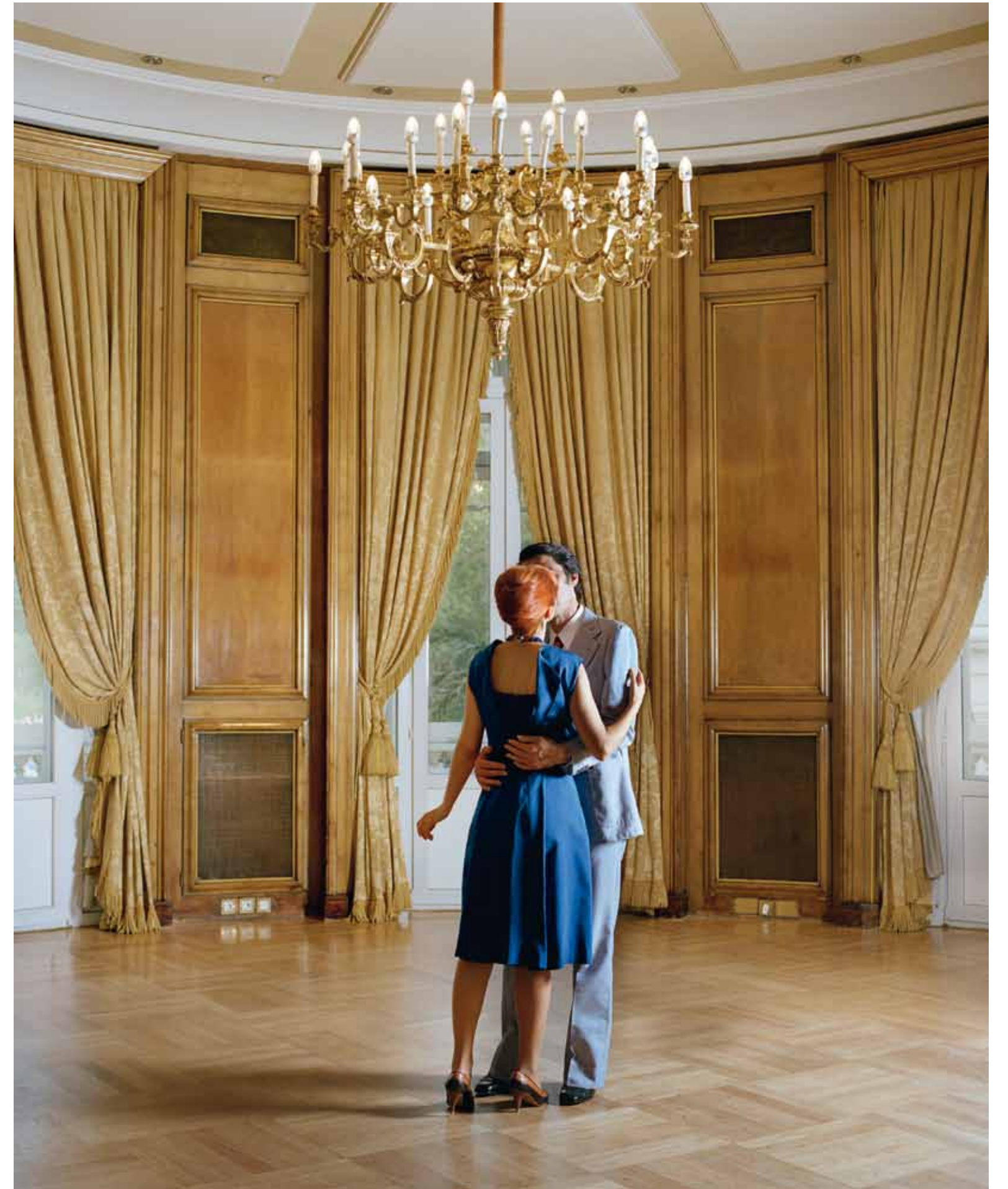












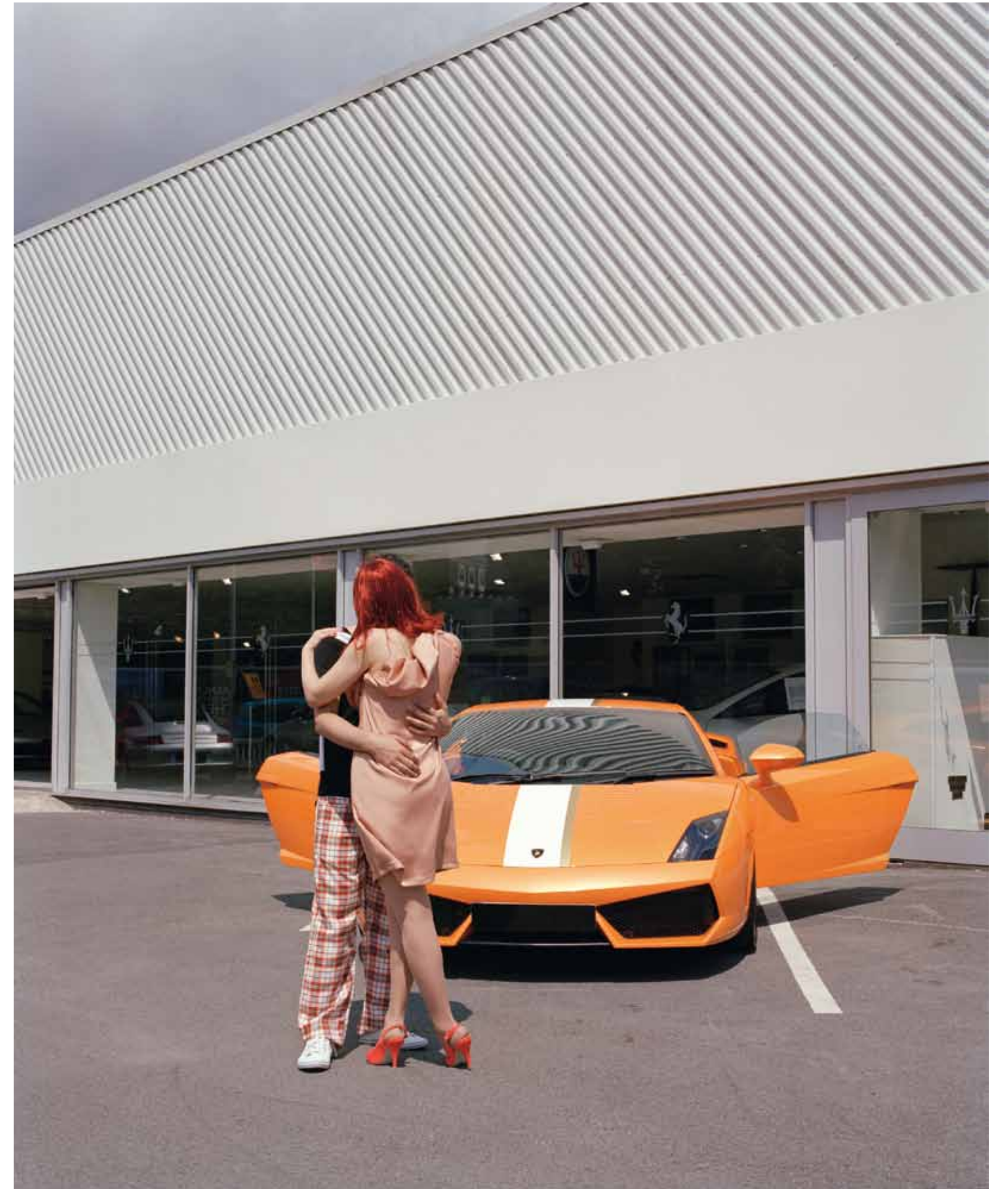




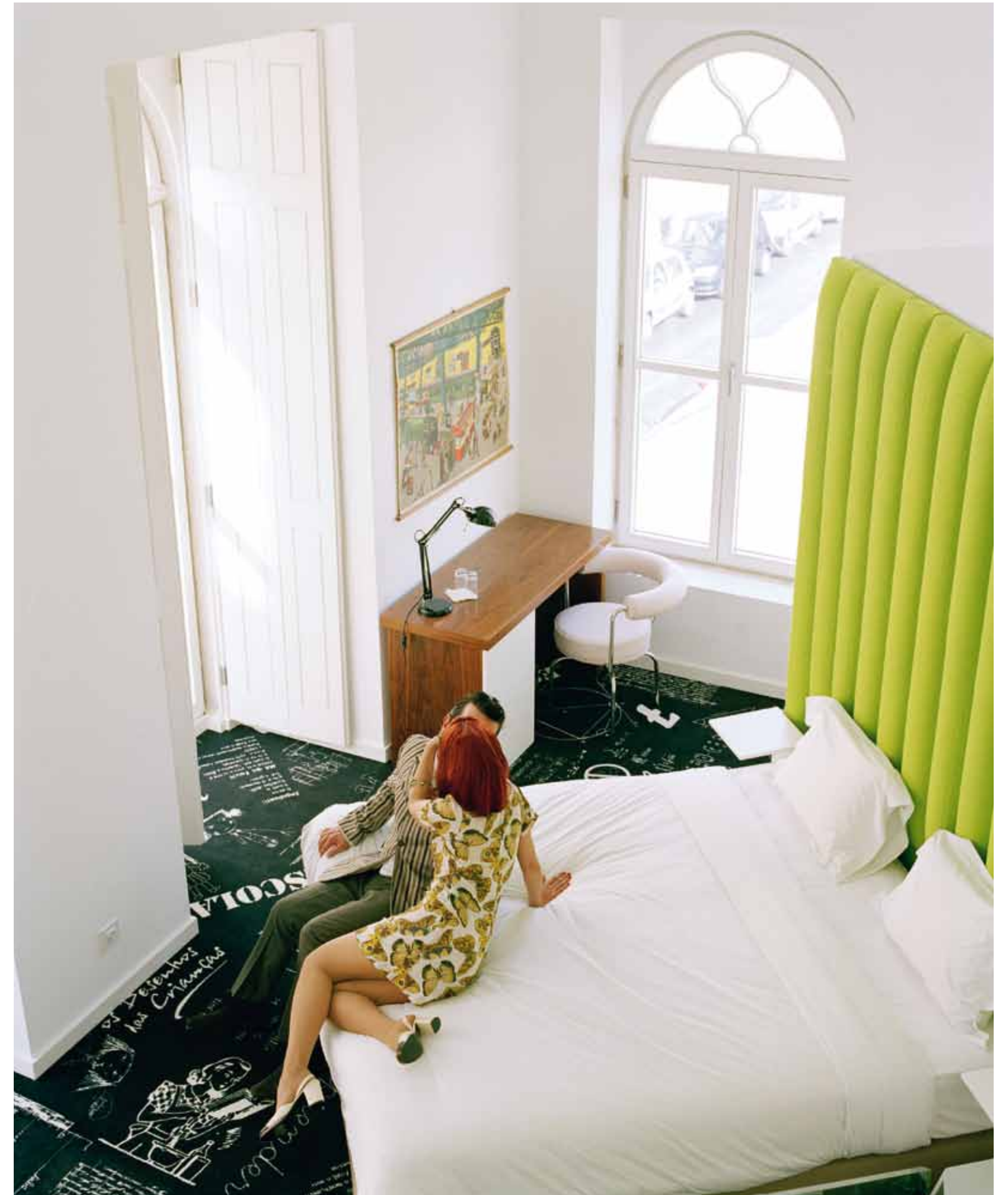




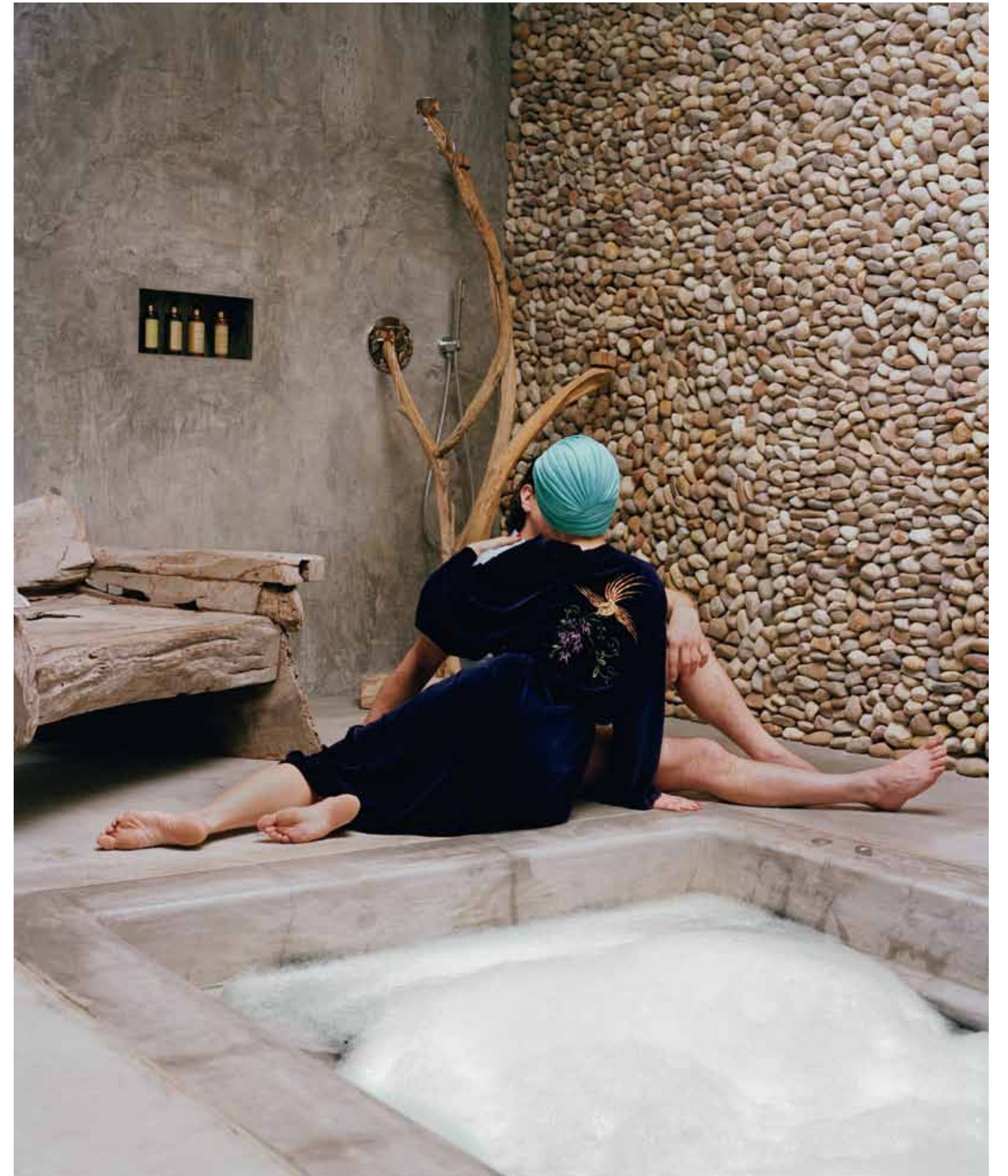














Love affairs, infatuation, myths and paradoxes¹

Carlos Yela García

What these images have in common is that they evoke one of the most intense moments we experience as a species: the kiss; and, more specifically, a lover's kiss. The kisses seen in these photographs are neither hurried nor routine kisses, but rather passionate ones, with close contact between devoted lovers, kisses in which romantic or passionate love seems to have more of a place than "companion love" or mere sexual desire (I have used "mere" here in a strictly descriptive sense, giving it no pejorative connotation whatsoever).

The settings and clothing, all of which are full of luxury, directly suggest a relationship between romantic love and consumption. And although it would be too cynical, as well as inexact, to assert that love is just another object of consumption, it is true that "capital" has found in romantic love a diverse market (romantic trips, romantic dinners, the celebration of unions, anniversaries, Valentine's Day, etc.). And the mass media makes sure to reinforce these ties. In fact, the mass media is the primary agent responsible for what is known as "romantic socialization", through which first the child, then the adolescent, and later on the adult, and finally the elderly person learns how, when, where, why and even who to fall in love with (and, equally or even more importantly, how, when, where, why

and who not to fall in love with). This learning is very effective, and even more so as we become aware of it. Among the things we learn about love, from children's stories to Hollywood movies, including the lyrics of popular songs, are the romantic myths, which we will now begin to discuss.

Besides luxury, there are two factors present in all of the images: youth and physical attractiveness. Although their faces are not visible, which, by the way, gives the photographs much added interest and originality, we can see that they are young models, elegantly dressed and groomed, tall and physically attractive. And youth and physical attractiveness are precisely two of the social pressures that we all undergo, to a certain extent, during our romantic socialization. Our society glorifies youth and beauty, as well as passion, and teaches us to make an association between them. Our overvaluation of physical attractiveness is well documented and affects not only love (Sangrador and Yela, 2000) but also all spheres of social life, including the process of hiring personnel or at the Courts of Justice (!) (as can be verified in any Social Psychology or Legal Psychology textbook).

On the other hand, the fact that it is the same woman in all of the images but the man is

1. To my (pleasant) surprise, the author of these photos, without even knowing me or knowing me only through reading my work, requested that I describe what these images made me think of, mainly in relation to the romantic myths and paradoxes that I have spoken about in various places (Barrón, Martínez, De Paul and Yela, 1999; Yela, 2000, 2003). I understood and still understand that she requests this of me as a doctor of psychology and specialized researcher and educator on the study of love from the perspective of Social Psychology, among other processes. Therefore, although I would like to let my "artistic vein" (literary, poetic...) run free, I suppose that what is expected of me should be more similar to "scientific discourse".

always different could be interpreted, if desired, as a metaphor for the current trend that we have come to call “serial monogamy”. In this way, the person, or in the case of our photos, the woman, ensures that the myths (norms) of finding a partner, exclusivity, faithfulness and passion are fulfilled, entering a new relationship once the latter dies out. Naturally there is no reason to understand this as something frivolous, as it often creates strong feelings of failure, guilt and deception, not only in the person who is abandoned but also frequently in the person ending the relationship under the subjective perception that there is nothing else he or she can do. Psychology of course does not intend to judge whether such decisions are morally correct, but rather to simply try to apply what is well known in order to relieve people from their suffering. Along these lines, it is interesting how many people who in all other aspects are completely happy with their partners feel obligated to leave their relationship because they no longer experience the passion that intensely moved them in the beginning (as if that were possible!) or because they feel attracted to another person (as if that were avoidable!).

If serial monogamy is a lifestyle option, adopted “freely”, and which does not cause pain to oneself or to others, he who writes

these pages shall not be the one to condemn it, but rather perhaps quite the contrary: mutual infatuation is one of the most intense and satisfactory sensations that human beings can experience. The problem arises when this “serial monogamy” becomes painful, truly turning into a sort of “compulsive serial monogamy”, with a person searching for eternal fanciful passion, imbued with a combination of myths such as finding a partner (the supposed need to have a partner), exclusivity (the supposed impossibility of being in love with two or more people at the same time), faithfulness (the imperative to satisfy all erotic desires only with one's partner), and the ability to withstand time (the supposed eternal nature of passion, if it is indeed true). This can be seen everywhere, not only in specialized literature and empirical studies, but also in the professional practice and in personal discussions.

And in pursuing these myths, or imbued with them, an individual faces a series of romantic paradoxes that end up confusing him or her:

1_ The paradox between desire and possession: One desires what one does not possess, and what one possesses in the best of cases is enjoyed but not desired. We psychologists sometimes speak of “post-goal disillusionment”

2. A very illuminating example is the confession, from Melibea to Calisto no less, in act XIX of La Celestina, once the longing lovers are finally reunited, “How will I sing, if your desire was that which governed my tune and caused my song to sound? For now that you have come, the desire has disappeared, my voice gone out of tune”

3. Sancho to Quixote: “love looks through spectacles which make copper look like gold, poverty like riches, and foul tears like pearls” (Don Quixote, Part II, Ch. XIX).

4. “When two people are under the influence of the most violent, most insane, most delusive, and most transient of passions, they are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal, and exhausting condition continuously until death do they part.” (G.B. Shaw)

5. “That the wise man speaks the truth is clearly proven / man, bird, animal, every cave beast / by nature always wants new company / and more so man than any other animate being” (Juan Ruiz: “Book of Good Love”. Verse 73)

(as the great Montaigne would say, “Our appetite condemns and scorns what it possesses in order to pursue what it does not possess”) ²

2_ The paradox between idealization and reality: Idealization of the loved one, which is the basis of infatuation and passion, clashes with the perception of the partner's reality as the relationship develops.³

3_ The paradox between passion and living together: We learn that infatuation and passion must lead to a stable union (whether it be called marriage, domestic partnership, cohabitation, and so forth), and it is precisely this stable union that is responsible for a decrease in passion⁴. The problem becomes complicated as social romantic norms not only require that passion lead to a life together, but also that one must feel passion, to a certain extent, for the partner with which one lives, which leads this natural decrease in passion to cause a certain extent of anxiety, along with the interpretation that there is no longer “true love”.

4_ The paradox between commitment and independence: Human beings seek affiliation, safety, special involvement, commitment to unity and support, but at the same time seek to maintain their independence, feel free, free

of burdens, and tend to avoid excessively rigid involvements. This universal dilemma between two opposite poles is spurred on by a society that pressures us to do both at the same time: to commit to another person and to be independent (particularly in individualistic cultures such as Western cultures in general). It is not surprising that the subjective balance between these two extremes (commitment and independence) generally shows up as one of the key components of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in love (Yela, 1999).

5_ And, finally, the paradox between faithfulness and the desire for novelty: This is, in some way, a concrete application of the paradox above, and has to do with the clash between a social norm (the more or less implicit and more or less strict prohibition against having intimate emotional and/or sexual relationships with someone other than one's partner) and the desire not only for promiscuity or sexual attraction (already described by the Archpriest of Hita himself)⁵ but also the desire to seduce and be seduced (and that one has or maintains that ability as an important part of our self-esteem).

It is therefore not surprising that the phenomenon of love, particularly in its stages of infatuation and passionate love, be in its

very essence of an ambivalent nature, as so many artists and writers have emphasized for centuries⁶.

To conclude, I will now interpret some specific photographs in particular which in my opinion bring to mind a relationship with romantic processes that I find to be of great interest (obviously, each individual will have his or her own particular interpretation of the images, which, on the other hand, is one of the goals of any piece of artwork). Through the beautiful images the author has given us, we can also consider the myths and paradoxes that I have discussed. Thus “Idilio En Campo Golf” represents above all a space of great depth that could be interpreted as everything that the couple has yet to experience (stressing, then, the myth of marriage or living together: that it is romantic passion, demonstrated by the kiss, that must lead to a stable union). “Idilio En Apartamento I” could be interpreted as saying goodbye to her husband or the person she is living with (because if it were her lover, we would think that it would take place within the home, more discreetly), which highlights one of the peculiar and novel characteristics of romantic love in our time: that passionate love, marriage or stable cohabitation and sexuality must be satisfied within the same relationship

(something that to some may seem to be the most normal thing in the world, but which is neither a norm in all cultures nor has always been in our own culture during other historical periods.) “Idilio En Apartemento II” depicts a couple in love at the beginning of their relationship (their home yet to be furnished), which once again suggests the myth of marriage (that passion leads them to share a home). In “Encuentro Ocasional En Suite De Hotel I”, the bed, shorter skirt, and the woman’s attitude all seem to suggest that this is more about seduction, that it has a more erotic connotation and, given that it takes place in a hotel, we could think that it is not her “stable” partner (just as in “Encuentro Ocasional En Suite De Hotel II”), which raises the clash in the paradox between faithfulness and the desire for novelty and how difficult it is to resolve. As for “Idilio En Galería De Arte”, this depicts lovers who appear to be floating among winged creatures, suggesting one of the defining characteristics of what we call a “state of infatuation” (and which we usually wrongly confuse with love, which is a much broader, longer-lasting concept with more subtypes and nuances). It is not surprising that Ortega would refer to said intense, grandiloquent and fleeting state (infatuation) as a “syndrome of temporary imbecility”, somewhat cynically, of course, but

6. Some clear, beautiful examples of this among the countless examples out there are the verses from the youngest of the Machados: “With or without you, hopeless are my sorrows; with you because you kill me, and without you because I would die without you” and “sorrow and that which is not sorrow, it is all sorrow to me; sorrow yesterday as I longed to see you; sorrow today because I did” or from Juan Boscán: “Seeing you was bad enough, but not seeing you would be worse: I would not be so lost, but would lose much more”

7. In this sense, I fully agree with Mariano Yela when he wrote that “love is not necessary in order to live, but it is necessary in order for life to be worth living”

also quite precise from a psychological point of view. Finally, “A Las Puertas Del Paraíso” is one of the most eloquent: the lovers, who as a result of their love are about to enter a heavenly state where everything else is to take a back seat, do nothing more than reflect another romantic myth, the myth of omnipotence (that true love can conquer above all, in turn legitimizing everything, which can lead to disastrous consequences such as, “I mistreat you but I love you” or, “He/she mistreats me but he/she loves me”). Love has a positive side, of course, and satisfies a wide range of basic needs that human beings have⁷, but it also has a negative side which has to do with social pressures, self-sacrifice, and romantic myths and paradoxes, which we have just barely touched upon and, as it seems, traditional romantic socialization does not gives us too many tools to cope with them.

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