

A KIND OF LOVING

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How can you love a city?

Well, you can love it out of excitement: with the pace of change, with the number of people, with the height of the buildings and the width of the streets. With the sheer mind blowing speed of the place.

Or you can love it out of lust, flattered by luxury riverside developments you can't afford, infatuated with new iconic architecture. God knows there are enough cities in the North that you can love in this way, that you can consume. Love like whirlwind romance and expensive dinners, love like shagging on fake sheepskin rugs in front of fake fires in fake factories next to canals.

It's difficult to understand, from the outside, from the first glimpse, how an ugly city with seventies buildings and a bad taste in its mouth can make so many people fall in love with it.

On the surface, this city is unlovable.
It doesn't fall into the standardized version of a Successful European City: retail per square foot, trendy department stores, mixed use developments. None of the buzzwords, none of the pages you'd normally see in the brochure. And architecturally, it's blank. Since they knocked the sixties down, we've had no architecture worthy of the name.
This city seems, at first glance, to be pretty mediocre.

But you have to look deeper, elsewhere. Because there are different things to love here. And with time, in the detail, you can see it.
This is a picture of the city we love.

The city we love is a lo-fi city.
The pace is different.
It feels like a day-dream, things take a little longer. A city where you can always walk home when a taxi is too much, and where most of the time you want to. A city that's small enough to know. Where you can always bump into your friends on a Saturday in the record shops without trying. A low-rise city, five storeys at the max, which isn't about skyscrapers and plate-glass and people like ants in the middle of it all. And this size, this pace, makes the city friendly. We love the city because love is on its lips. Where people on buses, in queues, in newsagents, call each other - strangers - Love. A whole city chattering at bus stops like bird song. This city isn't bigger than any one of us.
It's human.

The city we love is a different shape.
We don't want it to look like all those other cities, all architectural plastic surgery and botox-ed shopping precincts. It's a cliché, but we want something natural.
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The hills that shape our city are inconvenient.
They make everything run inwards, like the city is built in the middle of a giant bath.
But they're beautiful.
They're always there, in between the buildings, in the distance, green and majestic or brown and scrubby. Down in the valleys, there are fast, short, stupid rivers, that aren't big enough to build apartments on. And above them there's a sky that's always changing.
The city is like a theatre set.
The place is beautiful.

The city grows like a carpet.
Everything is alive.
In old Victorian parks, with avenues of trees and happy families. Or in the crop of weeds that bloom every summer, that should be the city's civic flower. In doorways, on verges, on the margins, where they shouldn't be. There are trees everywhere. Growing through pavements, along streets, around houses, like packaging.
It's like living your life outside.



