

Love and Other Technologies

Lang College, Spring 2007

LCST 3045A

M/W 2-3.40

Dominic Pettman

Course Description:

This course entertains the possibility that “love” – defined as a crucial cultural discourse – is in fact a form of technology. The seminar introduces established models of what love is (i.e., the heterosexual masculinist imaginary), and how it functions, whether considered by critics as a cultural code, an image repertoire, an unspoken contract, or an instrumental strategy. The focus is specifically on the historical transition between novels and films, as the dominant medium through which people learn to fall in love (and how to behave once they are in this exulted, yet over-determined, state).

Required Texts:

Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*

Alain de Botton, *Essays in Love*

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Seducer's Diary*

Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*

Bookstore: These titles have been ordered for you and are available at Bluestockings Books. {172 Allen Street between Stanton and Rivington :: 212.777.6028}. A representative from the store will bring the text book to our first class, so this is the most convenient time to buy it.

All other readings are available online through Blackboard. Free printing is available from the Academic Computing Center, on 13th St., between 5th and 6th Ave.

Course Requirements/Assessment:

1. Class participation/presentation: 50%
2. Midterm paper (2,000-2,500 words): 25%, due March 7.
3. Final research paper (4,000-5,000): 25%, due May 9.

Hardcopies only. No emailed papers, please. Lateness will be reflected in a lower final grade, half a letter for each day late (i.e., a B+ paper late by one day will become B-, by two days C+ . . . etc.). Any papers more than one week late will result in a failing grade.

Your ability to participate depends on coming to class with the readings done and notes taken. Interaction with peers and meaningful discussion is necessary in order for you to get the full benefit of the course. Coming to a seminar and not saying anything is like being in a band and not bringing an instrument to your gig. Having said that, indulging in weekly guitar or drum-solos is also an impediment to the band as a whole.

For the same reason, this course has a *no laptop* policy. Seminars are for the good of the group, and losing yourself in Wikipedia is not for the good of the group.

Eugene Lang Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend classes regularly and promptly. For courses that meet twice a week, more than 3 absences may result in a failing final grade. For courses that meet once a week, more than 2 absences may result in a failing final grade. If a student is more than 10 minutes late to a class, this will count as an absence. The course instructor may set stricter guidelines for a particular course. *In my case, I drop the student's final grade by one letter for each absence after the first 3.*

Eugene Lang Policy on Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc.) which may be derived from a variety of sources (such as books, journals, Internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc.). Students should refer to the Policy on Academic Honesty in the Eugene Lang College catalog for full information on the consequences of plagiarism.

Eugene Lang Policy on Disabilities:

Students requesting any accommodations for a particular course must meet with Ben Freier in the office of Student Disability Services, who will conduct an intake, and if appropriate, will provide an academic accommodation notification letter to the student to bring to Tom McDonald. Tom McDonald will review the letter with the student and discuss these accommodations in relation to the course. Mr. Freier's office is located in the Graduate Faculty building at 65 Fifth Avenue Room #410. His direct line is (212) 229-5626. The student has the responsibility to provide the approved letter to the instructor. Retroactive accommodations are not permitted.

Class Exercise

Each student is required to give a 30-minute presentation based on one of the readings. You are welcome to bring in other media to illustrate or support your own perspective on the arguments presented therein. Prior to this, you are asked to play one of your favorite love songs (or possibly least favorite), and then analyse the lyrics through the language of one of our authors.

SYLLABUS

Week 1 (Jan 22, 24): Introduction

What is love? What's love got to do with it? What historical continuities can we find in defining love through different epochs? How might we begin to think of its anachronisms, limitations and/or behavioural coercion?

1. Plato, *Symposium* (extract)
2. Dominic Pettman, "In the Fine Underwear of Our Minds," *Love and Other Technologies*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.
3. Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1986.
4. What is a Technology? (PPT)

Week 2 (Jan 29, 31): Libidinal Economies

What modes of exchange are encouraged or enforced by circuits of desire? Is it a gift or a commodity? Has it been warped by the forces of capitalism, or somehow transcend them? And finally, how do we account for the deflections or mediations of love? Is there such a thing as unmediated desire?

1. Alain de Botton, *On Love*. Grove, 2006.
2. René Girard, "Triangular Desire" in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976.

Week 3 (Feb 5, 7): The Structure of Love

What can the structuralists tell us about desire, in terms of mapping the movements of emotions and bodies from above? Does the exchangeability of lover and beloved disenchant love as a familiar, comforting discourse? Or does it make the process even more intriguing, suspended somewhere between physics and metaphysics?

1. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1979.

Week 4 (Feb 12, 14): Seduction

What is at stake in the age old game of seduction? Just as people fall "in love with love," are we constantly seduced by the very notion of seduction? How is this motif figured differently from different perspectives: psychological, cultural, political, etc.?

1. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Seducer's Diary*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
2. Jean Baudrillard, "The Ironic Strategy of the Seducer" & "The Fear of Being Seduced" in *Seduction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1991.

Week 5 (Feb 21): Confession

****Note: No Monday class – President’s Day****

Have we misread history when we consider the Victorians more “repressed” than ourselves? What is the relationship between identity and sexuality, and how has that developed through time? Would we consider today’s attitude to love and sex empowering or deluded?

1. Michel Foucault, “We Other Victorians” + “The Repressive Hypothesis,” *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Vintage, 1984.
2. Leo Bersani, “Sexuality and Esthetics,” *The Freudian Body*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Week 6 (Feb 26, 28): Temporal Obsession

What role does time play in the lover’s discourse? How does the passing of time strengthen or weaken the promises of the enamored? And what does this say about our relationship to those who drift and out of our personal sphere?

1. Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita* (Alfred Appel Jr., ed.) New York: Vintage, 1991.
2. Luchino Visconti, *Death in Venice*

Week 7 (March 5, 7): Melancholy Desire

To what extent is love a self-sabotaging phenomenon? Does it enjoy being thwarted? And if so, why is this the case, when we are taught to seek a life which ends “happily ever after”?

1. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*
2. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

****Mid-Term Paper Due March 7****

Week 8 (March 12, 14): Yearning a Living

Can love be considered a medium, specifically of communication? If so, what is the relationship of form and content in this case? If “the medium is the message,” then how is subjectivity shaped by the image repertoire of love?

1. David Lean, *Brief Encounter*
2. Niklas Luhmann, “Love as a Generalized Symbolic Medium of Communication” & “The Discovery of Incommunicability” in *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998.
3. Denis de Rougemont, “The Tristan Myth,” *Love in the Western World* (aka *Passion and Society*), London: Faber & Faber, 1940.

****Week 9: March 19-25 – Spring Break****

Week 10 (March 26, 28): Phantasm

What is the relationship between spectacle and sexuality? How does the representation of desire perpetuate the parameters of love? Is it possible to depict without objectifying? And if not, then are there ways to consider the latter as a perversely progressive process?

1. Stanley Kubrick, *Eyes Wide Shut*
2. Giorgio Agamben, "Dim Stockings," *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
3. Slavoj Žižek, "Introduction" + "From the Sublime to the Ridiculous: The Sexual Act in Cinema," *Plague of Fantasies*. New York: Verso, 1997.
4. Torben Grodal, "Love and Desire in the Cinema," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 2, Winter 2004.

Week 11 (April 2, 4): Hurts So Good?

Is love inherently sado-masochistic? What is the glue that keeps this hyphen connected to the will to inflict pain, and the will to receive it? What happens to concepts like passion and fidelity when pushed to the extreme limits of human endurance?

1. Lars von Trier, *Breaking the Waves*
2. Irena S. M. Makarushka, "Transgressing Goodness in *Breaking the Waves*," *Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1998.
3. Alyda Faber, "Redeeming Sexual Violence? A Feminist Reading of *Breaking the Waves*," *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 17, No. 1, March 2003.
4. Frans-Willem Korsten, "Is Bess a Bike? Gender, Capitalism and the Politics of the BwO in Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*." Pisters, Patricia (ed.), *Gilles Deleuze: Micro-Politics of Audiovisual Culture*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001.

Week 12 (April 9, 11): Asymptotic Encounters

How is the city figured as a modern, privileged site of erotic encounter? Does the anonymity of the city encourage or discourage the lover's discourse? How might "sex and the city" open new avenues for thinking the relationship between self and other?

1. Wong Kar-Wai, *Fallen Angels*
2. Zygmunt Bauman, "Falling In and Out of Love" in *Liquid Love: On The Frailty of Human Bonds*. London: Polity, 2003.

Week 13 (April 16, 18): A Self of One's Own?

Can we conceive of the "I" as something which comes after the "us"? Are we plural before we are singular? And if so, how does this undo our notions of finding a soul-mate?

1. Luce Irigaray, "Prologue" & "To Perceive the Invisible You," *To Be Two*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

2. Dominic Pettman, "Mind the Gap," *Love and Other Technologies*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.

Week 14 (April 23, 25): Technologies of Desire

What impact does new media have on the lover's discourse? Is our alienation from each other intensifying? Or does the internet and other new technologies allow greater global connections between potential lovers?

1. Pierre-Paul Renders, *Thomas is in Love*
2. Rachel P. Maines, "The Job Nobody Wanted," *The Technology of Orgasm: Hysteria, The Vibrator and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001.
3. Steven Shaviro, "The Erotic Life of Machines," *Parallax* 25 (October-December 2002) 21-31.
4. Chris Cunningham & Bjork, *All is Full of Love*

Week 15: (April 30, May 2): Monotony and Metonymy

What might be the downside of being in love? Is there anything positive to be gleaned from considering the marital home as a "domestic gulag"? Why are we so quick to sign contracts of sexual exclusivity? Can we separate love and sex in this age of supreme pragmatism? Can we slay the green-eyed beast? Is it possible to love someone, then set them free?

1. Luis Bunuel, *That Obscure Object of Desire*
2. Laura Kipnis, "Adultery," *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 1998, Vol. 24, No. 2, 289-327.

Week 16 (May 7, 9):

What are we falling in love with, exactly, when we experience intense or profound desire? Someone's "essence"? If so, does this essence really belong to the individual we have fixated on? Or is the situation more slippery and complex than that?

1. Eric Rohmer, *Claire's Knee*
2. Gilles Deleuze, "The Types of Signs" and "Essences and the Signs of Art," *Proust and Signs*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Week 17 (May 14): Delusions & Conclusions

Review and recap of the trajectory of the course

****Final Papers due: May 9****

Office Hours and Contact Information

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