



poetics and politics of sex
intimacy and its discontents

"i didn't think it would turn out this way" is the secret epitaph of intimacy.
—lauren berlant

spring 2015
tuesdays 2.30p - 5.00p
shriver 5
as.363.395
study of women, gender, and sexuality | political science

untitled, 1977
christer strömholm



COURSE DESCRIPTION

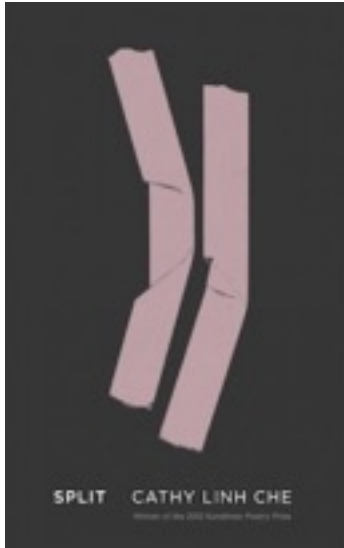
Intimacy usually designates the deepest, truest, and most meaningful relations between others and ourselves. Yet—or perhaps due to this closeness—intimacy often breeds trouble. Family members can be annoying, cold, violent. Friends can skewer open the wounds that they once helped to close. Beloveds can kill a dream. Amidst the frustration, anger, and depression that bubble up in intimacy, we sacrifice aspects of ourselves, demand that others meet our expectations, or leave someone by slamming the door. It's easy to point fingers when intimacy is ailing or failing. But what if problems with intimacy were due less to personal flaws than to deficiencies in its available forms?

This course explores discontents with forms and institutions of intimacy, such as the couple, the family, and the public. It focuses on how personal and political life shape each other through the rhythms, trajectories, and impasses of intimacy. It asks: What happens when politics and society authorize certain forms of intimacy but not others? What happens to desire when monogamy is held to be the only form of true love? What happens to queer intimacies with the increasing legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States? How might people relate to public identities that are both meaningful and partial? What might be gained and lost when intimacy settles for a form?

The course examines how dissatisfaction and longing denote a poetics that might alter our experiences of gender, sexuality, the personal, and the political. To where might we turn when disappointments plague the forms of intimacy that nonetheless anchor our lives and desires? What if intimacy pulls us away from the couple-form, home, reproductivity, and longevity? What might be the personal, social, cultural, and political ramifications of pursuing uncoupled, ephemeral, nonreproductive, nondomestic intimacy? What kinds of relations, understandings, and expectations would need to be invented? As we address these questions, we will examine issues such as optimism, ambivalence, loneliness, trauma, queerness, war, colonialism, and time.

Finally, this course explores the difficulty in describing intimacies and their discontents. How might cliché images, turns of phrase, and metaphors limit what intimacy could be? How might discontent push us to create other ways of approaching, understanding, and talking about intimacy? We will engage these questions through different genres and media, such as poems, aphorisms, a novel, a novella, essays, scholarly articles, photographs, and a film. We will discuss the relationship of genre, medium, and discipline to intimacy, poetics, and politics.

REQUIRED TEXTS



Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007

Cathy Linh Che, *Split*. Farmington: Alice James Books, 2014

R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the R's*. New York: Kaya Production, 1995

Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*. New York: Penguin Books, 2013

Adam Phillips, *Monogamy*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1996

Juliana Spahr, *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977

Laura Letinsky, *Venus Inferred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000

RESERVES

All other required and recommended readings are available on the library's eReserves:
<http://reserves.library.jhu.edu/access/reserves/index.php>

These films are reserved for our class:

Chungking Express (Wong Kar-Wai, 2008)

The Future (Miranda July, 2011)

Her (Spike Jonze, 2014)

In the Mood for Love (Wong Kar-Wai, 2002)

Last Life in the Universe (Pen-ek Ratanaruang, 2004)



ACCESSIBILITY

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact Dr. Brent Mosser in Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, 410.516.4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation

Our seminar will thrive on your contributions to discussion. I will be more of a discussion facilitator than a lecturer. Please come to class prepared to engage the readings, address your classmates' points, respond to presentations, and ask questions that further our discussion.

Presentation

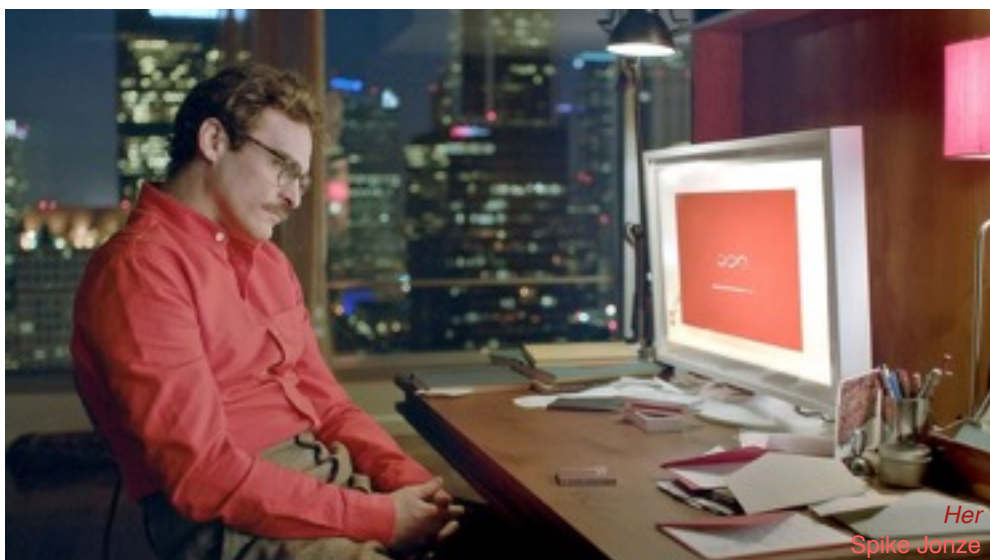
You will make one presentation on the readings for a week of your choice. You will also lead discussion while the class responds. Your presentation is an opportunity to focus on issues that you want to think through with the class. Spend more time crystallizing key themes than on summarizing the texts. Relate the readings to other texts and themes in the course. Quote a few particularly rich passages and explore them in detail. Comment on the style of the texts and the moods they induce in you. Pose questions for discussion while elaborating what led you to them. Please distribute a handout or copy of your presentation. I encourage brainstorming ideas with me beforehand.

Midterm

Your midterm assignment will be an 8-10 page paper that addresses a prompt through the class readings. You will have about two weeks to complete the assignment. After reading your paper, I will meet with you individually to discuss it. More details on the midterm assignment will be distributed during the semester.

Final

I will ask you to do something that is substantial to you. I encourage you to design your final project in a style and medium that suits you. In other words, you will not be confined to the scholarly paper, though that is an option. The time taken to complete your final project should be at least that of finishing a 12-15 page paper. More details will be offered during the semester.



Her
Spike Jonze

January 27

Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy," 281-288

Adam Phillips, *Monogamy*

February 3

Laura Kipnis, "Love's Labors" in *Against Love*, 11-51

Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 1-9, 13-24, 29-32, 34-40, 45-49, 67-74, 97-103, 106-109, 112-116, 136-137, 140-143, 167-168, 171-172

February 10

Michael Warner, "Beyond Gay Marriage" in *The End of Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*, 81-147

J. Jack Halberstam, "Gaga Relations: The End of Marriage," 95-130

Judith Butler, "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?" 14-44



February 14 (Valentine's Day)

February 17

Lauren Berlant, "Preface," "Introduction: Intimacy, Publicity, and Femininity," "Poor Eliza," and "Uncle Sam Needs a Wife: Citizenship and Denegation" in *The Female Complaint*, vii-xii, 1-23, 33-67, 145-167

February 24

Lauren Berlant, "Remembering Love, Forgetting Everything Else: *Now, Voyager*," "It's Not the Tragedies That Kill Us, It's the Messes': Femininity, Formalism, and Dorothy Parker," and "Overture/Aperture: *Showboat 1988—The Remake*" in *The Female Complaint*, 169-231, 265-279



March 3

Peter Coviello, "Introduction," "Disappointment, or, Thoreau in Love," "Whitman at War," and "Coda: a Little Destiny" in *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1-75

José Esteban Muñoz, "Queerness as Horizon" in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 19-32

Lauren Berlant, "The Sublime and the Pretty" in *Venus Inferred*, 3-20

Photos from Laura Letinsky, *Venus Inferred*

March 10 - Midterm due @ 2.30p
Her (in-class film viewing)

March 17 - Spring Break



March 24
Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*

March 31
Michael Cobb, "Introduction: Bitter Table for One," "The Inevitable Fatality of the Couple," and "The Shelter of Singles" in *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled*, 1-39, 41-68, 105-156

Thomas Dumm, "Being" in *Loneliness as a Way of Life*, 21-50

April 7
Juliana Spahr, *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*

Sharon Hayes (TBD)

April 14

Mimi Thi Nguyen, “Introduction: The Empire of Freedom” and “The Refugee Condition” in *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*, 1-82

Cathy Linh Che, *Split*



April 21

Haunani Kay-Trask, “Settlers of Color and 'Immigrant' Hegemony: 'Locals' in Hawai'i,” in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*, 45-65

Bianca Isaki, “HB 645, Settler Sexuality, and the Politics of Local Domesticity in Hawai'i,” 82-102

Dean Itsuji Saranillio, “Colonial Amnesia: Rethinking Filipino 'American' Settler Empowerment in the US Colony of Hawai'i,” in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*, 256-278

R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the R's*, 1-70

April 28

R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the R's*, 71-149

Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life” in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, 135-140

José Esteban Muñoz, “The Future is in the Present” and “Cruising the Toilet” in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 65-81, 83-96

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” 547-566



May 11 - Final due @ 5p